

The Impact of Cultural Translations on Albanian Students: Theory versus Practice

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Abstract

The cultural shift within translational studies has influenced the humanities and translation arena in many countries, not excluding Albania.

*When translating the bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, which is written based on multiple cultural histories, the talents of the translator are put to the test when attempting to translate words and meanings that otherwise allude an entire population.*

The data taken for this research comes from surveys and interviews extracted from a study group of undergraduate students from the University of Vlora, “Ismail Qemali” in Albania.

This research will bring together the theoretically perceived impact of cultural translations on Albanian students, as well as the practical challenge faced by the proper professional translator, which surprisingly contradict each-other in most cases.

The results are startling and go against what many scholars deem to be standard belief and theory of translational studies.

Keywords

cultural translation, theory, practice, translation approaches, challenges, versus, Kasoruh.

1. Towards cultural translation

It is interesting to notice that the concept of translation has changed with the passing of years. Translation is not considered as the branch of linguistics which deals only with rendering a text from one language to another (SLT to TLT) as previously believed, but now, as bringing one culture to the focus of another culture and making it as acceptable and relatable as possible to the target language audience. Since the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the cultural turn taking place in humanities also influenced translations as well to move its focus from the text to the cultural component. This is known as the “*Cultural Turn*” in translation studies and coined as a metaphor adopted by Bassnett and Lefevere in 1990.

If we take into consideration the diversity of contemporary translation theories, we will see that different scholars come to agree at one point: translation today faces a more important challenge and that is the culture barrier which takes more focus than the linguistic one.

2. Students' Approach to the Cultural Translation

To investigate the impact of the “*cultural turn*” within translations, I conducted a survey with undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University of Vlore “Ismail Qemali”, Albania. The aim of this research was to see how students conceptualized the cultural translation which they had studied during their translation course studies and if it had influenced their opinion. In the meantime, their prevailing theoretical views will be confronted with the real challenges faced by the translator of *The Da Vinci Code* into Albanian, Amik Kasoruho. These challenges were claimed by Kasoruho in some interviews that I had with the author as part of this research.

There were 80 students in total who were asked to answer different questions concerning translation theory, cultural translation and to write short comments on these issues. Some of the most important issues are mentioned below.

When the students were asked if they had read the Albanian version of *The Da Vinci Code*, almost 75 % said that they had. They identified that the author was Dan Brown, but most of them didn't know the name of the translator who had brought the book into Albanian.

When asked if “bestseller” books represent real values or they are simply commercialized books which make a lot of money, most of the students answered that if a book becomes a bestseller, it certainly has value of some kind. The book might not have purely stylistic or literary values, but it may have moral, ethical, cultural, historical or other characteristics which makes it distinguishable from the other books. The same opinion was shared by the translator when I asked him the same question.

To the question which is the most difficult aspect of literary translation: the transmission of Source Language to Target Language or the transmission of one culture to another, the students replied in this way: 41% the transmission of SL to TL, 39% the transmission of culture. The results seem contrary to what most translation theorists have come to believe. Cultural elements which are prevalent in literature, present the most difficult challenge for a translator.

When the students were asked to write down their opinions about which characteristics a good translation should have, some of the most prevailing ideas were:

1. An original transmission of cultural elements. The translator shouldn't use the domestication method; otherwise the book loses his originality.
2. Preservation of source language values, ideas and ideology of the time and place the book was written.

3. Naturalness: a translation first and foremost should sound natural in the target language, a thing which most literary Albanian translations lack today and good translations are hardly encountered among thousands of translations published every day.
4. A translator should take into consideration the level of his audience, i.e. to be understandable for all.
5. It's really important to preserve the quantity and the quality of information given in the source text, not to shorten, extract or deform the original.
6. A good translator should not change the message, emotions and feelings of the source language author, no matter how strange they sound in the target language.

3. The Portrait of a remarkable Albanian translator.

Amik Kasoruho is, undoubtedly, one of the best Albanian translators who has brought into Albanian more than 60 books from English and American literature, including outstanding writers such as: Isabel Allende, Harold Robbins, Patrick O'Brian, John Selby, J K Rowling, Dan Brown and Emily Bronte, Nathaniel Hawthorne, etc.

Considered by the critics as a remarkable translator, Kasoruho is appreciated and appraised for his wonderful translations, his natural abilities, and his extremely rich and unique idiolect. His status is remarkable and outstanding in the field of Albanian literary translation, thus giving his audience the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the most renowned books and bestsellers.

4. Theory Versus Practice?

Having had the opportunity to meet the translator and to discuss with him about various issues concerning translational challenges and how he faced them in practice, I discovered many interesting issues which were contrary to what I have studied in the translation theory books. Below are mentioned some well known tips for translators, given in translation books opposed by the real challenges of a professional translator as Kasoruho.

a. *It is highly recommended that a translator should read the literary text at least once before they start to translate it.*

You begin the job by reading the original for two purposes: first to understand what it is about; second to analyze it from “a translator’s point of view, which is not the same as a linguist’s or a literary critic’s. You have to determine its intention and the way it is written for the purpose of selecting a suitable translation method and identifying particular and recurrent problems. (Newmark 1988: 11)

On the contrary to Newmark, Kasoruho never reads the whole book proposed by the publishers before starting to translate it. He doesn’t read it from the fear that he may not like it and consequently he should have to give it up.

b. *A writer should take into consideration what kind of readership he is writing to and consequently his translator should do the same thing*

Newmark emphasizes:

On the basis of the variety of language used in the original, you attempt to characterize the readership of the original and then of the translation, and to decide how much attention you have to pay to the TL readers. You may try to assess the level of education, the class, age and sex of the readership if these are marked. (Newmark 1998:13)

Kasoruho is against this theory, and he never takes into consideration what kind of audience that he is translating for because he argues that books are written for everyone and everyone chooses what is appropriate to their own level. A translator, he added, should follow the author, word for word to preserve their style, intention or emotions as close to the original as possible.

c. *There are theories for or against to use the domesticating method while translating*

One of the most urgent questions facing the translator who possesses this knowledge is “What to do? How do I translate?” Many have tried to answer this complicated question, past and present, but perhaps none as decisive as that offered by the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher.

“There are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him. (Lefevere 1977: 74 cited at Venuti 1995: 20)

One debates between using the domesticating method or the foreignizing method when approaching a text.

In, *The Translator's Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti seems to be against the domesticating method in his translations. Venuti believed that a translator should leave the reader in peace, as much as possible, and focus mainly on the author.

On the other hand, Umberto Eco emphasizes that there are certain moments in translation where the domesticating method is indispensable (Eco 2001; 23), while foreignization made the text incomprehensible.

Kasoruho, as a professional translator, *is against the idea of domestication* due to the way the text loses its originality and the translator taints the text with their own opinions and backgrounds.

d. The translation of culture is the most difficult challenge in translation.

Kasoruho does not share the same idea with many scholars that culture is the most difficult challenge in translation; he believes that *culture is the essence of translation*, but not the most difficult element for him. Following the original, not changing the style, the tone and the register of the source language author, is the most difficult aspect of translation for him. The problems vary according to a myriad of reasons but it is the translator's responsibility to make the right choice at the proper time and these challenges determine the remarkable talents of successful translators.

Conclusions

The cultural aspect is a very important factor influencing translation today. The debate attracts scholars' interest and agreeing on the mutual idea that cultural elements attribute to the essence of translation and yet, at the same time, poses as one of the most difficult barriers to be challenged by the translator. However, when we compare and contrast the theory and its practices, significant changes can be found.

In a survey conducted with undergraduate and graduate students, concerning this theory, some interesting remarks were observed. The first thing that the results uncovered was that students can identify only the name of the author and they hardly ever read the name of the translator. The translator continues to remain in the shadow and this problem needs to be approached as the translator should take the merit that they deserve. When asked if bestsellers have any influence on their target reader, both the students and the translator said that they do influence the reader but there are various other influences as well. They did not,

however, have the same opinion concerning the most difficult challenge of translation. The students responded that the most challenging issue is rendering one language to another, while for the scholars and seasoned translators, the cultural elements are the most challenging.

Both parties seem to agree that the translator should steer away from the domestication method; otherwise the book loses its originality. Many scholars have different opinions on this issue, depending on their own backgrounds and experiences. It is safe to say, according to the focus groups, that a writer and the translator should consider what kind of audience they are writing to. The translator is totally against this theory, justifying his choice with the opinion that when a writer and consequently his translator write a book, they should not write for a certain readership, but it is the readership which should choose what is suitable for their expectations.

In conclusion, most of the time theory seems to be far away from its practice and what we teach our students, many times, does not fully work in practice.

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