

2 Non-literary & Literary Text and Translation Reviewed

“Non-literary translation is the art of failure.”

(Mike Shields)

“Literary translation bridges the delicate emotional connections between cultures and languages and furthers the understanding of human beings across national borders. In the act of literary translation the soul of another culture becomes transparent, and the translator recreates the refined sensibilities of foreign countries and their people through the linguistic, musical, rhythmic, and visual possibilities of the new language.”

(Professor Rainer Schulte, Co-Founder of American Literary Translators Association)

The purpose of this chapter is to present and contrast non-literary and literary text as two distinct genre/text types in the sense of “the specific classes of texts characteristic of a given scientific community or professional group and distinguished from each other by certain features of vocabulary, form and style, which are wholly function-specific and conventional in nature” (Alcaraz and Hughes, 2002: 101). In addition, the chapter also aims at juxtaposing the two text types from the point of view of their translation specificities.

Admittedly, the theory of text types, which seeks to classify texts according to their functions and features duly places non-literary and literary texts in a class of their own. The fact, however, that most text typologies do not seem to agree on what to contrast literary texts with – technical, pragmatic, non-fictional or even ordinary – implies that what distinguishes literary from other texts may not be entirely obvious. Commonsensically speaking, if there is no tacit agreement on what makes the realm of non-literature and literature singular, it may be equally uneasy to decide on what grounds non-literary and literary translation, respectively, should be awarded their own niche (see Hermans, 2007: 77). In this light, the opinion that the difference between the language of the non-literary and literary text is tangibly easier to feel than pinpoint has been voiced by many (Vilikovský, 1982; Hermans, 2007; Sánchez, 2009). Therefore, the present chapter will try to give a true picture of this issue, first and foremost from

the angle of text linguistics, paving the way for the ensuing comparative translational analysis in Chapter 3.

2.1 Towards Defining Text: General Preliminaries

Text may be taken for a specific language medium which enables the formation of cognitive ideas with the aim of imparting information and forming/interpreting a coherent sequence of utterances. It is supposed to be endowed with referential continuity and logical reasoning. For this reason, to create, understand and translate a text means to form a specific cross connection between its semantic contents.

Within the ambit of text linguistics, text was initially viewed as an organised unit larger than a sentence which consists of a sequence of formally (*i.e.* morpho-syntactically) and semantically linked utterances unified thematically as well. This means that a text was understood as a network made of intertwined syntactic wholes: individual sentences and paragraphs. This, by a long way, oversimplified formal conception of a text was substantially altered after the so-called communicative-pragmatic turn in linguistic studies at the outset of the 1990s when a text started to be conceived of as “text-in-function”, “text-in-situation”, as a “socio-communicative functional unit” (Schmidt qtd. in Göpferich, 2006: 61). Hand in hand with this, one of the central issues became the elaboration of the notion of textuality: *which properties does a text have to possess in order to be called a text?* In this regard, de Beaugrande and Dressler (2002: 10) interpret text as a “communicative occurrence” which must meet certain standards/criteria of textuality, these being: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. If any of these standards is not considered to have been satisfied, the text will not be communicative and in turn, non-communicative texts are treated as non-texts.

Göpferich offers the following definition of text in her article in the seminal German publication *Handbuch Translation* by Snell-Hornby:

A text is a thematic and/or functionally oriented, coherent linguistic or linguistically figurative whole which has been formed with a certain intention, a communicative intention and which fulfils a recognizable communicative function of the first or second degree and represents a functionally complete unit in terms of content (for the communicative function of the first or second degree); (Göpferich, 2006: 62; translation by author).

As it follows from the recent definition of text given above, the modern perception of text takes it beyond a mere list of sentences and emphasizes the communicative act-in-situation providing the framework in which the text has its place. Nowadays, the linguistic and semiotic fashioning of text seems determined by its communicative function and the requirements for the above-said thematic orientation, intentionality, a recognizable communicative function, coherence and completion, seem common for the majority of text definitions available (cf. de Beaugrande and Dressler, 2002; Doloughan, 2009).

2.2 Non-literary Text and Translation

The label “non-literary text”, as broad as it may seem, covers a wide range of texts from administrative, legal and other official documents, via economic and business texts, scientific, technical up to publicist texts. If the style of non-literary texts were to be analyzed, one of their quintessential features would in all probability be represented by notionality, being the consequence of their thematic structuring since pragmatic content requires precision and unambiguously stated terms. In accord with this, the semantics of non-literary texts’ words is confined to systemic coherence and all the other irrelevant associations are pushed to the background.

As far as the language of non-literary texts is concerned, there is a striking tendency towards stereotypical structures and language clichés in general. Precisely these means of expressions make the non-literary style more or less formalized. The direct relationship between language on the one hand and extra-linguistic reality on the other seems crucial in the non-literary style. Accordingly, non-literary translation in its essence stands for a “stylistic operation which is based not on the transfer of aesthetic but pragmatic information” (Popovič, 1977: 192, translation by author). Despite insurmountable differences between non-literary and literary texts, a common point where literary and non-literary style meet is a stylistic field of iconicity since the translator of a ‘non-literary’, ‘specialized’, ‘pragmatic’ or ‘non-fictitious’ text, whatever its name, cannot be completely resistant to the figurative way of expression (ibid.: 193).

Even if the customary perception of translation might be in the minds of many linked up with translating literature, at present *belles-lettres* is believed to occupy not more than 5% of the total of translated works. The remaining 95% of translations on the

present-day market are made up by texts originating in other fields bearing the common umbrella term non-literary translation (Newmark, 2004: 8). This figure suggests that the non-literary translation in the 21st century is of supreme importance.

The non-literary text chosen for the purposes of the present publication represents an institutional-legal text, stemming from the secondary EU legislation. Within the context of legal texts, the analysed specialized text is unique in a sense that it blends traits of both international legal documents and domestic law (Kjaer, 2007: 40) for many texts sourced from secondary EU legislation are directly applicable in the individual Member States of the EU.

Furthermore, seen from the point of view of text linguistics, the non-literary text under scrutiny belongs according to Schäffner and Adab (1997: 325) to a very distinctive text type, so-called hybrid text. These texts, being the upshot of cultures and languages in contact, are a feature of contemporary intercultural communication marked by an increasing level of internationalization. They result from a translation process and exhibit features that somehow seem ‘out of place’, ‘strange’ or ‘unusual’ for the receiving, *i.e.* target culture. Hybrid texts “allow the introduction into a target culture of hitherto unknown and/or socially unacceptable/unaccepted concepts through a medium which, by its non-conformity to social/stylistic conventions and norms, proclaims the otherness of its origin” (ibid.: 328). Hence, hybrid texts are endowed with features that are somehow contradictory to the norms of the target language and culture.

Seen from a different angle, within the framework of Reiss’ translation-oriented text typology, borrowing Bühler’s three-way categorization of the functions of language, the non-literary text under focus can be positioned as informative and operative text type. Notably, the non-literary text is based on the plain communication of facts and information; and simultaneously it appeals to the receiver (*i.e.* citizens of the Member States in the EU) to act in a certain way (Reiss, 1981/2000: 163).

Moreover, despite the fact that the institutional habitat epitomizes a proverbial melting pot of motley cultures of the Member States, communication in this ambience should be thought of as essentially acultural, or at least marked by ‘the reduction of the cultural embedding’ (van Els qtd. in Biel, 2006: 4) since it is not possible to determine the source and target culture unequivocally. In addition to this, affinities with any existing target language conventions are to be explicitly avoided so as to differentiate between the EU level and national practices (Koskinen, 2001: 294). Even if the comparison of non-literary and literary text will be postponed until section 2.4 of this

publication (see below), it is noteworthy to mention at this point that literary texts, in contrast to specialized texts, certainly stand for a very cultural medium of expression where the achievement of the proximity of (socio)cultural norms between the SL and TL is of supreme importance.

From a translational point of view, the non-literary text corresponds to Newmark's semantic translation which is marked by a great respect for the original tending to be "more complex, more awkward and more detailed" (1981: 39). The translator perpetrating semantic translation is heedful of the syntactic structures and stylistic peculiarities of the ST, transferring not only meaning but also the form of the original. The semantic translation, as elucidated by Newmark, could also be likened to Nord's documentary translation which "serves as a document of a source culture communication between the author and the ST receiver" (2005: 80), allowing the TT receiver access to the ideas of the ST but making them aware that they read a translation.

More narrowly, legal translation is often treated as a specific category in its own right within non-literary translation and is described as "the ultimate linguistic challenge," combining the inventiveness of literary translation with the terminological precision of the technical translation (Harvey, 2002: 177). Nonetheless, the primary purpose of institutional-legal translation is to recreate the SL content in the TL in such a manner so as to achieve the identical meaning, intent and legal effect. As Šarcevic aptly explains:

Since the success of an authenticated translation is measured by its interpretation and application in practice, it follows that perfect communication occurs when all parallel texts of a legal instrument are interpreted and applied by the courts in accordance with the uniform intent of the single instrument (Šarcevic, 2000: 5).

Thus, it can be said that the ultimate goal of legal translation is to produce parallel texts that will be interpreted and applied uniformly by the courts. In present-day multilingual society legal translation plays a key role as a communication mediator in international law. As noted by Sandrini (2006: 117), "as globalization trends intensify, the role of national legal systems as the all-important factor in legal translation is being diminished by transnational legal frameworks". Since legal texts result in legal effects their translation ought to be as accurate as possible so as to not cause any inconvenience.

2.3 Literary Text and Translation

Although it must be admitted that not much attention has been paid to the issue of the definition of literature over the past two decades or so, what has attracted interest, as Culler contends, is that literature is seen as a historical and ideological category with its social and political functioning (Culler, 1997: 36). Nowadays, definitions of literature tend to be functional and contingent rather than formal or ontological, as illustrated by Eagleton (2008: 9) who argues in his influential textbook *Literary Theory* that literature is best defined as “a highly valued kind of writing”. On the other hand, Culler adopts in his *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* a two-pronged approach: the designation ‘literature’ serves as ‘institutional label’, denoting a “speech act or textual event that elicits certain kinds of attention” (ibid.: 27). However, for historical reasons attention of the literary kind has been focused on texts displaying certain features, notably such things as “foregrounding of language, the interdependence of different levels of linguistic organisation, the separation from the practical context of utterance, and the perception of texts as both aesthetic objects and intertextual or self-reflexive construct” (Hermans, 2007: 79). This specificity of literature is also confirmed by Toury (1980) who depicts it by means of “the presence of a secondary, literary code superimposed on a stratum of unmarked language” (qtd. in ibid.: 78)

In order to grasp the specifics of literary translation, it is deemed reasonable to look at the properties of a literary text first. These are pre-determined by the realm of literature, which has an innate capacity to appeal to one’s feelings and unfetter one’s imagination. Bearing this in mind, it might seem appropriate to pose a question why most people usually enjoy literary texts much more than their non-literary counterparts. It would not be an overstatement to suggest that literary texts guarantee entertainment on the basis of their artistic quality, provide the recipient with the author’s experience or world-view which may motivate them to think, act and re-evaluate their attitudes.

Clearly, the most important feature of a literary work of art is that it is a bearer of an aesthetic function. Literary text comes into existence as a subjectively transformed reflection of the objective reality in tune with the aesthetic-emotional intent of the author: he/she endeavours to convey his/her ideas, thoughts and emotions, which is enabled by his/her orientation towards experience. From the point of view of the language resources choice, an immense lexical variability coupled with the

uniqueness of expression comes to the fore here. Another crucial feature of literary text is connected with the release of the polysemy of words for an adequate understanding of the text is achieved only “through a careful mapping of its entire denotative and connotative dimension” (Hermans, 2007: 82). Besides, it is claimed that the principal feature of literary text rests on its focus on the message, not on content (Landers, 2001: 7; Burkhanov, 2003: 139; Hermans, 2007: 78-79; Sánchez 2009: 123).

Consequently, literary translation must be approached as “a kind of aesthetically-oriented mediated bilingual communication, which aims at producing a target text intended to communicate its own form, correspondent with the source text, and accordant with contemporary literary and translational norms of the receptor culture” (Burkhanov, 2003: 139). In the ambit of literary translation, the translator delves in the aesthetic pleasures of working with great pieces of literature, of recreating in a TL a work that would otherwise remain beyond reach or effectively encrypted.

One of the exasperatingly difficult things about literary translation in general is the translator’s ability to capture and render the style of the original composition. Notably, in literary translation *how* one says something may be as significant, sometimes even more significant, than what one says. In technical translation, for instance, style is not a consideration as long as the informational content makes its way unaltered from SL to TL. Landers illustrates this issue by using a vivid freight-train analogy:

In technical translation the order of the cars is inconsequential if all cargo arrives intact. In literary translation, however, the order of the cars – which is to say the style – can make the difference between a lively, highly readable translation and stilted, rigid, artificial rendering that strips the original of its artistic and aesthetic essence, even its very soul (Landers, 2001: 7).

Ideally, the translator should take pains to have no style at all and endeavour to disappear into and become indistinguishable from the style of the author he/she translates – “now terse, now rambling, sometimes abstruse but always as faithful to the original as circumstances permit” (ibid.: 90). However, all literary translators have their individual styles, *i.e.* characteristic modes of expressions, which they more or less consciously or unconsciously display.

More specifically, literary translation traditionally splits into translation of poetry, translation of prose (fiction) and translation of drama, reflecting three major

strands of literary texts. While in the translation of poetry, achievement of the same emotional effect on the TT recipient is intended, in drama the relationship between text and performance, or readability and performability comes under focus (see Hrehovčik, 2006: 53-55).

Translating prose is of special interest to us since the literary text under investigation represents a sample of fiction. Compared to other genres of literary translation, poetry in particular, far fewer works have been devoted to the specific problems of translating literary prose. One explanation for this could be the higher status that poetry usually holds, but this is more probably due to the proliferated erroneous assumption that a novel is usually supposed to have a simpler structure than a poem and is therefore more straightforward to translate (Bassnett, 2002: 114). Since two prose texts differ not only in languages entering the process of translation but also in terms of cultures and social conventions, fiction translation must be thought of as not only interlingual transfer but also cross-cultural and cross-social transference. Unlike other literary genres, fiction translation is not endowed with an insignificant social influence because translated novels or short stories (being the most common genres of prose fiction) may be read by millions of voracious readers and sometimes successful novels may be adapted into movies. All in all, the yardstick by which quality of fiction translation is measured is the correspondence in meaning, similarity in style (both authorial and text style) and function (Hrehovčik, 2006: 54).

Turning our attention to the selected literary text subject to analysis, it should be said that the novel pertains to expressive text type within the framework of Reiss' text typology because the author foregrounds the aesthetic dimension of language (Reiss, 1981/2000: 63). Drawing on a well-known Barthes-inspired dichotomy employed for literary texts classification, the analyzed novel belongs to so-called 'readerly' texts. These texts have a fairly smooth narrative structure and commonplace language, with narratives and characters presented to the reader by the text allowing him to be a 'consumer' of the meanings, as opposed to 'writerly texts', challenging the reading process in some way and making the reader work much harder to produce meanings from a range of possibilities (see Thornborrow and Wareing, 1998: 148-149 for more detail).

From a translational angle, the literary text corresponds to Nord's 'instrumental translation', which

serves as an independent message-transmitting instrument in a new communicative action in the target culture, and is intended to fulfil its communicative purpose without the receiver being aware of reading or hearing a text which, in a different form, was used before in a different communicative action (Nord, 2005: 81).

In order to flesh out the explanation above, it should be added that TT receivers read the TT as if it were a ST written in their own language. What is more, Nord's instrumental translation can be put on a par with Newmark's 'communicative translation' whose essence rests on producing on its readers "an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original", being smoother, simpler, clearer, more direct and tending to undertranslate (Newmark, 1981: 39). Last but not least, literary texts may brim with culture-specific terms, in contrast to non-literary texts, which supports the idea that literary translation champions rendering as an instrument of cultural transmission and negotiation.

2.4 Comparing Non-literary and Literary Text

Having paid due attention to non-literary and literary text separately, this subchapter can now home in on juxtaposing the two text types. The substantial difference between the two is that whereas non-literary text is concerned with information, facts and reality, literary text comprises the world of the mind, *i.e.* ideas and feelings and is grounded on imagination.

While non-literary texts are primarily about objects from the extra-linguistic reality, literary texts usually revolve around fictitious characters, being ontologically and structurally independent from the real world. Even though literary texts attempt to represent reality, they only imitate it at their best, which makes them mimetic in nature. This pre-determines some semantic specifics of these two text types under discussion: while non-literary texts are based on precision, reason and can be characterized by more or less logical argumentative progression, literary texts as the product of author's imagination offer a breeding ground for vagueness of meaning, ambiguity and multiple interpretations. Besides, non-literary texts are written to be skimmed or scanned, while literary texts are produced to be assimilated slowly or repeatedly and widely appreciated by readership. Non-literary texts, on the one hand, are expected to fulfil a certain pragmatic function while literary texts, on the other, are not intended for any specific purpose; they can convey a range of intentions (to inspire, offer advice or even

shock), although they can gain their more specific and possibly individual pragmatic function during the reading process.

Concerning linguistic properties of the investigated textual genres, the language of literary texts is susceptible to getting old quicker because the text's stylistic layer is burdened more in comparison to non-literary text. By contrast, what is getting old in non-literary text is actual text information only (Popovič, 1977: 192). Further, in terms of lexical specificities, vocabulary of non-literary texts is based on a high degree of notionality, standardized language schemata and clichés with no register blending permitted. On the contrary, the lexical facet of literary texts cannot be squeezed into any sort of universal patterning, depending on author and his/her lexical richness it varies from text to text. An important difference in lexis between the two textual genres also lies in the use of poetic language, so endemic to literary texts, abounding in metaphors, similes, personifications and other poetic devices which in a way make the language of literature truly specialized, too. However, in marked contrast to non-literary texts, no specialized subject matter knowledge is usually required for a literary text's comprehension (granted, unless one reads *e.g.* John Grisham's novels which are set in a lawyer's environment where the rudimentary knowledge of law for translator would not come amiss).

Moving onwards, contrasting non-literary and literary texts from a translational point of view, some radical dissimilarities can be observed, too. Firstly, rendering non-literary text demands frequently complete faithfulness to the ST and utmost precision in terminology, not admitting a very creative participation for the translator. Especially the translation of institutional-legal text, constituting a partial subject of interest of this publication, is heavily controlled and governed by norms. On the other hand, translation of literary text is freer and more creative for it is supposed to offer an undistorted interpretation of the fictitious metaculture, serving as a gateway to the fictitious world and its culture. Thus, "if literary translation is considered an art, then non-literary translation may be considered a science" (Hrehovčík, 2006: 56). Secondly, in non-literary texts the author's personality is hidden to say the very least, if not invisible, whereas in literary texts writer's personality is fully exposed given the communication of his/her world-views, attitudes, and convictions. Thirdly, the interpretation aspect in the non-literary text fulfils only an auxiliary function in stark contrast to literary translation (see Popovič, 1977: 192). Consequently, the non-literary translator is

required to be an expert in the field in which he/she translates in order to be able to perform an adequate intrasemiotic translation.

Last but far from least, the always sound Peter Newmark in his article cogently sums up the difference between non-literary and literary translation as follows:

Literary and non-literary translation are two different professions, though one person may sometimes practise them both. They are complementary to each other and are noble, each seeking in the source text a valuable but different truth, the first allegorical and aesthetic, the second factual and traditionally functional. They sometimes each have different cultural backgrounds, occasionally referred to as ‘the two cultures’, which are detrimentally opposed to each other (Newmark, 2004: 11).

Taking a critical approach, he then goes on to assert that while “literary [translation] is viewed as traditional, old-fashioned, academic, ivory-tower, out of touch, the non-literary is philistine, market-led, coal in the bath [and] uncivilized”(ibid.).

One way or another, having contrasted the two textual genres from the point of view of their properties, language content and translation, seen matter-of-factly the differences between them are more than obvious. However, comparing two very dissimilar textual genres is likely to yield yet intriguing outcomes in the following comparative analysis of their translation procedures.