

LITERARY TEXT THROUGH THE PRISM OF TEXT LINGUISTICS & TRANSLATION STUDIES RECONSIDERED

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Abstract: This article, largely synoptic in nature, zeroes in on the literary text from the point of view of text linguistics and translation studies. It focuses on text in the most general terms and at the same time points out the problem of sorting out the realm of literature from 'non-literature'. Literary text is presented as a bearer of communicative and aesthetic function, which has a crucial bearing on the approach to its translation. Finally, the article also contrasts literary and non-literary texts from the angle of their content properties, function, lexical means and translation so as to stress ostentatious differences between them and emphasize the uniqueness of the literary text.

Key words: text, literary text, text linguistics, translation, non-literary text.

Introduction

Admittedly, the theory of text types, which seeks to classify texts according to their functions and features duly places 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 literature and non-literature singular, it may be equally uneasy to decide on what grounds literary and non-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 literary and non-literary text is tangibly easier to feel than pinpoint has been voiced by many (Vilíkovský, 1982; Hermans, 2007; Sánchez, 2009).

Therefore, the present article will try to give a true picture of this issue, first and foremost from the angle of text linguistics, accompanied by some translational insights, too. The purpose of this article is to present literary text as a distinct genre/text type in the sense of “[...] a written linguistic manifestation which when perceived is to trigger off a feeling of the beautiful” (Ritlyová, 2011: 36, translation by author). Apart from the aesthetic dimension, it possesses certain inherent linguistic properties, features of lexis and style. In addition, the article also aims at juxtaposing literary and non-literary texts from the point of view of their language and translation specifics.

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. However, in case of some literary texts, the author may play with the above on purpose in order to produce a certain effect on the text recipient.

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, *i.e.* 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). However, in the Anglo-phonetic setting, “text” in the narrow sense of the word implies its formal facet only, without any context since the term “discourse” is preferred for utterances perceived as meaningful wholes with a certain communicative intention (Cook, 1994: 156).

2 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 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 target language 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 source language to target language. 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 customarily 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 target text recipient is intended, in drama the relationship between text and performance, or readability and performability comes under focus.

Translating prose is of considerable relevance nowadays. 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 the quality of fiction translation is measured is the correspondence in meaning, similarity in style (both authorial and text style) and function.

Turning our attention to characterizing literary texts on the basis of potential linguistic frameworks, literary texts commonly correspond 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, they may be either 'readerly' or 'writerly' texts. While the former 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, the latter challenge the reading process in some way and make 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, literary texts in the most general sense concur with 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 target text receivers read the target text as if it were a source text written in their own language. Moreover, 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 stark contrast to non-literary texts, which supports the idea that literary translation champions rendering as an instrument of cultural transmission and negotiation.

3 Comparing Literary and Non-literary Text

Having paid due attention to literary text separately, this section of the article will now home in on juxtaposing literary and non-literary text types in order to highlight some ostentatious contrasts between them. The substantial difference between the two is that whereas literary text comprises the world of the mind, *i.e.* ideas and feelings and is grounded on imagination, non-literary text is usually concerned with information, facts and reality.

While literary texts usually revolve around fictitious characters, being ontologically and structurally independent from the real world, non-literary texts are primarily about objects from the extra-linguistic reality. 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 literary texts as the product of author's imagination offer a breeding ground for vagueness of meaning, ambiguity and multiple interpretations, non-literary texts are based on precision, reason and can be characterized by more or less logical argumentative progression. Besides, literary texts are produced to be assimilated slowly or repeatedly and widely appreciated by readership, while non-literary texts are usually written to be skimmed or scanned. 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 (*e.g.* to inspire, offer advice or even shock), although they can gain their more specific and possibly individual pragmatic function during the reading process.

Concerning the linguistic properties of the investigated textual genres at hand, the language of literary texts is susceptible to getting old quicker because the text's stylistic layer is burdened much more compared 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 literary texts cannot be squeezed into any sort of universal patterning as it varies from text to text, depending on author and his/her lexical richness. On the contrary, the lexical facet of non-literary text is based on a high degree of notionalty, standardized language schemata and clichés with no register blending permitted. 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).

Furthermore, upon contrasting literary and non-literary texts from a translational point of view, some radical dissimilarities can be observed, too. Firstly, translation of literary text, compared to its non-literary counterpart, 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. On the other hand, rendering non-literary text demands many a time complete faithfulness to the source text and utmost precision in terminology, not admitting a very creative participation for the translator. Secondly, whereas in literary texts writer's personality is fully exposed given the communication of his/her world-views, attitudes, and convictions, in non-literary texts the author's personality is hidden to say the very least, if not invisible. Thirdly, the interpretation aspect in 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 cogently sums up the difference between non-literary and literary translation in one of his articles 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 texts from the point of view of their properties, language content and translation, seen matter-of-factly, the differences between them are more than obvious. Despite these, at first glance, incommensurable differences between literary and non-literary texts in the most general sense, one should realize that a common point where literary and non-literary style meet, however, is a stylistic field of iconicity. Thus, similarly to literary translator, 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 (Popovič, 1977: 193).

Conclusion

To sum up our discussion about literary text, it seems apt to use the quote by Rainer Schulte (2010), Co-founder of American Literary Translators Association that “literary translation bridges the delicate emotional connections between cultures and languages [...], 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.“ In this article, literary text has been presented as a subjectively transformed reflection of the objective reality. Based on an unbridled use of the connotative potential of words, its principal features rest on the focus on the message, which is bound up with the need to capture its style in translation. Employing the selected linguistic frameworks, literary texts pertain to Reiss’ expressive text typology and ‘readerly’ or ‘writerly’ texts drawing on Barthes-inspired dichotomy, although in some cases this distinction may not be so black and white. Seen from a translational angle, literary text translation corresponds to Nord’s instrumental or Newmark’s communicative translation. Finally, comparing literary and non-literary texts has underscored apparent contrasts between them, which are many a time tangibly easier to feel than pinpoint.

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