

## **The Translation of Drama**

### The translation of dramatic texts (Plays)

The text of a play is another genre of literary language which in general has certain characteristics which the literary translator has to take into consideration when undertaking the translation of drama texts. The dramatic text is both a literary art and a theatrical art. Dramatic text is the foundation of the stage performance, through which its value can be completely achieved. Its particularity lies in its purposes primarily for stage, and then for page. It is true that educated people tend to read scripts of dramas, but it is to be enjoyed, understood and felt by the audience in the very place where it is staged. Drama is a "staged art", and a play consists of (1) a story, (2) told in action, (3) by actors who impersonate the characters of the story. And the playwright/ director is not directly involved as there is no narrator but sometimes through stage directions.

Drama translation, in general, considers non-verbal, verbal and cultural aspects as well as staging problems and must beactable and speakable. Translating drama is challenging because it must consider semantic as well as cultural, historical and socio-political aspects and also the form-content dichotomy. Zuber expresses that "not only the meaning of a word or sentence must be translated, but also the connotations, rhythm, tone and rhetorical level, imaginary and symbols of association". Translating dramatic work from one language into another means transferring the text and cultural background, so it can beactable on the stage. The audience must be able to understand it immediately and directly. Translation of a play requires more consideration of non-verbal and non-literary aspects than does the translation of novels or poetry. A play depends on additional elements, such as movements, gestures, postures, mimicry, speech rhythms, intonations, music and other sound effects, lights, stage scenery and the immediate impact on the audience. Most dramatists do not intend to write literature, they are writing for actors. Consequently, the translator of a play should not merely translate words and their meanings but produce speakable and performable translations. In a translation process it is necessary for a translator to mentally direct, act and see the play at the same time

A play text is piece of literature written with a view to being performed on a stage usually. The dramatic text is thus related to such paralinguistic systems as pitch, intonation, inflection, loudness, as well as gestures in addition to the system of interaction between the actors who perform such a play, and their use of space on the stage. The theatre text

is also characterized by dialogue, as well as presence of stage directions within the body of the text that are eliminated in performance and replaced by other signs or actions. Unlike the other types of literary genres, a play text is read as something incomplete, because the full potential of the text can not be realized but in performance. In fact, there is a notion of multiplicity in the act of reading a play text:

- a. The play text can be read as a part of an academic course (i.e., as a piece of literary reading).
- b. The play text can be read a directional reading (i.e., taking its direction on stage into consideration (whether to act it or not).
- c. The play text can be read an actor's reading with emphasis on the extra linguistic features of the signs such as pitch, tone, etc.
- d. A play text can be read as a post-performance reading. In other words, is in a dialectical relationship with its performance on stage.

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### **Translation of Plays**

The nature of the play text constitutes a challenge for the literary translator, because of the many non-linguistic factors that are involved in the process of translating it. The translator of a play text (who undertakes a translation for the theatre) requires and awareness of multiple codes within and without the play text. In the case of poetic drama, the translator has to care for metrical features; but in the case of naturalistic dialogue, the translator has to reproduce in the TL the appropriate speech rhythms. The translator of the dramatic text should also take into consideration that he has to be aware of the changes in register, tone and style, that are bound to certain context.

The translation of dramatic texts is perhaps as challenging as the translation of poetic texts though it poses a different kind of problems for the translator. Here the questions of pitch,

tone, gestures, body language, culture and many others come into play. Dramatic texts are normally meant to be performed rather than read and this entails a special kind of treatment that takes into consideration the audience's or the reader's role or the text's "performability". As Judith A. Inggs explains, "The translator of a dramatic text is generally also obliged to disambiguate not only the words of the play, but the actions, the gestures, and even the attitudes of the characters" (Inggs:34). Moreover, the translation of dramatic texts involves dealing with non-textual features such as tone, register, dialect, style, costume, gesture, body language, dramatic conventions, etc.

The translator's task becomes all the more difficult when it comes to the issues of dubbing and subtitling which require correspondence between the text and the extra linguistic effects of sound and gesture. Different translation theorists and practicing translators have adopted different translation strategies for dealing with dramatic texts: reader-oriented translation, performance-oriented translation, prose translation or a verse translation. Recognizing the special features of dramatic texts and their difference from other types of prose texts, Bassnett-McGuire disapproves of the practice to translate dramatic texts in the same way as prose texts. She argues that in translating a dramatic text it is difficult to separate text from Performance. Consequently, the translator must determine which structures are performable and translate them accordingly into the target language, a procedure that would entail making major linguistic and stylistic changes. According to her, the concept *performability/playability* is not something fixed but varies from one period to another (122-123), and so the translator has to consider performability as a variable in dramatic texts translation. In short, the translation of dramatic texts involves not only the linguistic transference from SL to TL but also a transfer of the function of the language utterances in relation to theatrical discourse. All these restrictions make the translation of dramatic texts a very demanding task.

Most of the plays that go into a theatre. Words in the theatre are to be "recited", to be said on a stage, and that means a series of restrictions or general conditions to be taken into account: the time it was said and written, the style, the language, etc. The translator should say aloud the words that he is translating for a play, to hear how they sound on stage. One thing is to read and another is to "say" something. A text can be well translated in a book, but sound awful on stage. The work of the translator does not end when the work is given to be performed. It is advisable for the translator to work with the director and the actors to resolve problems when the text is put on stage. It is important to take into account the words used at the time the play takes place as well as the audience to which it is directed.

So, the translator should work until the play is put on stage. That is the best recommendation for the translation of plays.

A play is meant for stage performance. Translating a dramatic work is in many ways different from translating the other genres of literature, for the language spoken in a play is colloquial and not necessarily formal. It isn't simply an act of transferring linguistic or verbal rhetoric per se; it is an act of cultural shift and remaking, involving cross-cultural interaction of homogeneity, and adaptation of cultural heterogeneity. It is both a linguistic and cultural exchange of conversations and dialogues. Drama translation involves actability of the characters, performativity of the roles, clarity of thoughts, and brevity of speeches. Time, place and action, as well as the stage and the audience, are to receive special consideration as far as drama translation is concerned. The paper investigates the extent to which translation theory gives rise to the strategy of 'intentional betrayal' to attain the 'translatability' of the 'untranslatability.' The paper again attempts to validate the analogical dichotomy between theory and practice in translation studies, focusing on the dynamics of translation based on a translational process of loss and gain.

In the translation of dramatic texts, different translators have used different approaches in carrying out their task:

1. Translating the theatre text as a literary text or work:

In this method of handling the theatre text, the text is treated as a piece of literary work in which the translator is concerned with being faithful to the original (S.L.) work. In fact, this approach is the most common practice among the translators of theatre works, particularly when the translator undertakes the translation of the complete theatre works of a certain author or playwright.

2. The S.L.-culture oriented approach of translating theatre texts:

In this method, the translator tries to reproduce certain S.L. cultural features in his rendering of the text in an attempt to make use of such elements as a means of adding some comic flavour, or to try to be faithful to the SL text.

3. The Performance oriented method of translating theatre texts:

In this approach, the translator takes into consideration the dimension of performance in his rendering of the SL text in terms of fluent TL speech rhythms which can be uttered by the actors without any difficulty, as well as the equivalent registers and accents in the TL. In addition to the omission of certain passages that are too closely bound to the S.L. culture and linguistic context.

4. The poetic approach of translating theatre texts:

In this method or approach, an S.L. verse dramatic text is translated into a T.L. poetic dramatic form that is thought to be the most appropriate equivalent of the S.L. text. It often happens, however, that the reproduced T.L. version of the dramatic text becomes obscure and vague with regard to its meaning when the poetic approach is adopted.

#### 5. The co-operative approach of translating theatre texts:

This approach involves the co-operation of at least two persons to carry out the production of the T.L. text one of whom is usually an S.L. native speaker (or someone with a very good command of the S.L.). This approach takes into consideration the problems related to the performance of a theatre text such as the different theatre conventions of the S.L. and the TL. cultures; as well as the different styles of performance that are employed by the speakers of the two languages (i.e., the S.L. and the T.L.)

#### **Problems in the translation of Drama**

When translating a play text that is remote in time, the translator may face the problem of the existence of more than one version of the text with some crucial differences between them. The well-known Shakespearean play Othello, for instance, has come down to us in two different versions: the first Quarto which was published in 1622, and the First Folio that was published in 1623. A third version which seems to be an amalgamation of both the Quarto and the Folio was published in 1630, and was given the name, the Second Quarto. There is no agreement, however, as to which of the versions is more authoritative. Sanders (1984) holds the view that the first Quarto and the first Folio are derived from two different manuscripts of equal authority for which Shakespeare himself is held to be responsible that he had composed at different periods of time. The translators of Othello have to decide whether to follow the Quarto, the Folio, or both of them. The translators of Othello into Arabic, for instance, are inconsistent in handling the different versions. Let us consider some textual differences in the two versions of Othello:

Ch. 2, sc.3: Quarto 1:"Enter Othello, Cassio, and Desdemona"

Folio I : "Enter Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, and attendants."

Jabra: يدخل عطيل, ديزديمونة

Mutran: يدخل عطيل و ديدمونة و كاسيو ونفر من حاشيته

Jamal: يدخل عطيل و ديدمونة و كاسيو و أتباع

Al-Khamiri: يدخل اوتيلو و ديدمونة و كاسيو و بعض الأتباع

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra seems to follow Quarto I. in this instance; Mutran, Jamal, and Al-Khamiri follow I.

Ch.2, Sc. 3, 221-2: Quarto I: "And Casio high in oath; which till tonight I ne'er might see before".

Folio I:" And Casio high in oath; which till tonight I ne'er might say before."

Jabra: وكاسيو يصيح بشتائم لم أكن حتى الليلة أعرف نطقها

Mutran: وكاسيو يقذع بألفاظه قذعاً ماسمعه من قبل الآن

Jamal: وسمعت كاسيو يشتم ويلعن مستخدماً ألفاظاً لم يسبق لي أن لفظتها من قبل

Al-Khamiri: وسمعت كاسيو يسب سباً لم أسمع مثله من قبل

Jabra, and Jamal seem to have followed Folio I, Mutran and Al-Khamiri seem to have followed Quarto I. in the instance under discussion.

Theatre texts that have become down to use from remote or distant periods may also contain certain words the meanings of which have considerably changed in the course of time. Such words may become pitfalls for the translator who is not aware of this fact. For instance, in Othello, chapter 4, scene 1, 184-5 as Desdemona is described by Othello as:

"Of so high and plenteous wit and invention"

The word "*invention*" which is used by Othello as he speaks of Desdemona' i.e., in its Shakespearean (Elizabethan period) context meant "imagination", which is totally different from the contemporary denotation of "invention". Unfortunately, some translators have rendered it in accordance with its cotemporary signification; and have missed the mark or its original (Elizabethan) sense:

It has been rendered as (فطنة) by Mutran, (مهارة) by Jamal, and (ابتكار) by Jabra.

The written text in fact is the raw material on which the translator has to work, and it is with the written text itself that the translator must begin. This does not imply that the translator is free in translating the dramatic text as pure literary piece of writing. The language of a play text mainly consists of dialogue. The dialogue unfolds in an orderly manner both in terms of time and in space; and is much related to the extralinguistic situation which includes the speakers themselves, as well as their environment which surround the speech act, or the utterance. The situation sometimes affects or interferes with the dialogue and the dialogue in its turn affects the situation. In this case of translating a play text, the translator has to take into consideration and attend to the fact that a literary text which is written to be performed (i.e., a play text) is written for voices, and contains many extra linguistic auditive and visual signs in addition to the coded

gestures that pattern within the language of the play to serve the function of the text. the translator should therefore think deeply of the function of S.L. play text, and has to make the necessary modifications in order to reproduce the equivalent function of the S.L. in his rendering, i.e., in the T.L. play text (MacGutire,1980).

Consider some examples of Arabic translations of some textual material from Shakespearean drama:

Macbeth (Act V):

Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow,  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
 To the last syllable of recorded time,  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
 Told by an idiot full of sound and fury,  
 And then is heard no more, it is a tale  
 Signifying nothing.

Khalil Mutran's rendering:

كل ليلة تنقضي تتمهد لبعض الأناس الضعاف  
 طريق القدر! انطفئ انطفئ أيها النور المستعار

هنيهة! ما الحياة؟ إن هي إلا ظل عابر إن هي إلا الساعة التي يقضيها الممثل على ملعبه  
 متخبطا تعباً، يتوارى ولن يرى. إن هي إلا أقصوصة يقصها أبله  
 بصيحة عظيمة، وكلمات ضخمة على حين أنها خالية من كل معنى

Muhammad Abu Farid's rendering:

بل غد بعده غد و غد  
 تحبو تلك الخطى القصار ديبيا

تتوالى يوماً فيوما  
 إلى آخر حرف مسجل في الزمان

كل أمس أضاء لحمقى  
 في طريق يقضي لموت التراب  
 أيتها الشمعة الضئيلة بعدا لك بعدا  
 فإنما العيش ظل  
 كخيال يمشي،  
 وكاللاعب المسكين  
 في مسرح يضج ويزهى  
 ساعة قدرت له  
 ثم لا يسمع بعدها مدى الأيام  
 إنها قصة يرددتها المعتوه  
 صوت وهيجته دون معنى

It seems that Mutran has made substantial alterations to the text under discussion, since the style he uses is prosaic, and the effect of the original is much reduced. The significant repetition of the word "tomorrow" which functions as a means of reflecting the boring monotony of Macbeth's life has been distorted by the translator.

He has also dropped the second line with its significant alliteration "pretty pace". His use of *ولا يُرى* after *يتوارى* seems vague and inexpressive, and therefore inappropriate. His rendering of the last two lines and use of *بصيحة عظيمة* as a translation of "full of sound and fury" is unfortunately inappropriate as well. The short and highly expressive conclusion of the dramatic lines under discussion has been much longer, and less expressive by the translator:

كلمات ضخمة على حين أنها خالية من كل معنى

As for the second Arabic translation (i.e., that of Muhammad Abu Farid), the translator has attempted a poetic reproduction of the original text. He reproduces the repetition of the first line thought in a much less effective way; since the begins with it awkwardly: as:

بل غد بعده غد وغد

His literal rendering of the S.L. image of time "To the last syllable of the recorded time" seems inexpressive and vague:

الى آخر حرف مسجل في الزمان

His rendering would have become much more expressive and vivid has he made a slight change in the image thus:

الى آخر حرف في سجل الزمان

His rendering of the image concerning 'death', "dusty death" as: *موت التراب* Is also vague and inexpressive in Arabic. It would have been a much better rendering had



he made use of the normal Arabic collocation of such an image by changing the word order into: تراب الموت ; or by simply using : تراب . (literary: dust) as a symbol of death.

His translation of the image " Life's but a walking shadow " into Arabic in a literal way as: ما لحياة الا خيال عابر فإنما العيش ظل كخيال يمشي would perhaps have been better expressed as

It is explicit that unless the translator of dramatic texts is aware of the difficulties involved in this type of translation, as well as the many unique features that characterize this literary genre, he is expected to make many errors and do much harm to the original text.

The translator is not the only and last author of the translated dramatic text. Drama is in a constant process of translation. The translator's interpretation is only a basis for the final – stage interpretation. The translator's creative participation on the final version is much lower than that of a translator of other literary texts, as the following order of the communicational process of drama translation shows:

Author → Translator (interprets 1) → producer/director (interprets 2) → other participants: designers, actors (interprets 3) → audience (interprets 4).

He remarks that this process does not show hierarchy of interpretations, but shows a process of development in terms of time. For this reason, it is necessary to translate the dramatic texts as closely as possible to the original, otherwise the interpretation by the last participant in the chain might be changed and deformed, and the original intention of the author can be lost or completely twisted. Cooperation of the stage interpreters with the translator is advisable in this complicated process of drama interpretation.

### **Dramatic Dialogue** (الحوار المسرحي)

Plays are literary texts that depict action via dialogues of acting characters and authorial notes (i.e., description of physical action of actors, place and time circumstances etc.). Dialogue is a form of mostly linguistic interaction between at the least two participants in a conversation.

Dramatic dialogue requires a specific approach while being translated. Compared to dialogue in other literary genres, like novels or short stories, the meaning of a dramatic dialogue is enriched and supplemented by intonation, expressions, gestures and movements of the actors. These supplementary features are necessary to fulfil the mission of the dramatic dialogue. The translator of such a piece of work has therefore to think not

only about the written form of the translation but also about its interpretation on stage. Naturally, the best condition for translating a dramatic dialogue is the possibility to see the particular performance in its original version. But not every time this is possible. That is why the translator has to be particularly careful and sensitive while translating a theatre piece. What looks satisfying on the paper might not necessarily sound good on the stage and vice versa.

A dramatic dialogue as an utterance, a specific case of spoken language that is intended to be performed and listened to, and has a functional relation to a) the colloquial norm of a spoken or colloquial language, b) the listener (addressee), i.e., other characters on stage and in the audience and c) the speaker, i.e. a dramatic character.

The stage dialogue includes, except for its active participants, one more agent, i.e. the audience. It means that all direct participants of the dialogue are accompanied by another participant, though incommunicative, who is particularly important as everything that is said in a dramatic dialogue is intended for the audience, to affect their mind.

Monologue is any utterance that does not directly require an immediate, appropriate and adequate verbal (or non-verbal) reaction. In a monologue an expressive function may be often found although it may simultaneously fulfil the other functions. Though it is the most often case, there is no precondition that a monologue shall be pronounced by one character (we may encounter cases of a “developed” monologue that may be created gradually by the particular speakers, or even a collective monologue). It is necessary to distinguish monologues that are not intended for any receiver (some of them may even aim for an inner dialogic reaction) and monologues that suppose the presence of listeners. Monologue maintains its importance especially in the field of drama and theatre.

Mostly a monologue used to be a self-evident convention. Particular characters were established to fulfil this convention. A character of such a status may have had several tasks. To introduce the action, to comment on it, to explain the turns of events, to introduce the essential circumstances and facts, etc. Monologue always asserts and demarcates itself in a particular form of a relationship towards a dialogue, only in this way it may gain particular limitation and substantiation.

There is a dialectic relationship between the character in dramatic text and the language, (created by author or translator) that he speaks. The character influences the language and the language is an expedient by which the role is characterized. The dramatic character

does not necessarily have to use the same language variety from the beginning till the end of the play. Characters develop throughout the play and their language may consequently change.

Within the language of a dramatic character, it is necessary for the translator to distinguish two categories:

1. **Idiolect** is a set of personal, psychological, ideological and stylistic features via which we can recognize the originality and individuality of the author. The idiolect does not only represent the way the characters speak but also what they talk about, i.e., the extent and obsession of their themes via which the character releases his opinions, emotions and intentions.

2. **Sociolect** is a set of features of a speech that characterizes the speaker and his affiliation to a social, professional, generational or regional group. The idiolect of any author is formed on the basis of a sociolect, that represents the author's affiliation to a particular literary movement or style, to a historical genre or the whole period.

Any dramatic piece cannot do without a dramatic action. The dramatic action can be fulfilled via monologues, dialogues or in a non-verbal way, via "physical" acting. In a dramatic language the features of original verbal communication are frequently used i.e., gestures, facial expressions, pauses, paralinguistic moments that are described by the author or the translator in scenic and authorial notes.

### **Stage directions** (الإرشادات المسرحية)

Stage directions are instructions in a play for technical aspects of the production like lighting, sound, costume, scenery or props and, most importantly, the movement of actors onstage. It is the stage directions that tell you what a character looks like, where they travel in the space and what the space looks and sounds like.

Stage directions give vital information for the action and relationships between people, things and places inside a dramatic text. They also give an insight into the playwright and how they approach their work. *Shakespeare* was famously very light on the stage directions. This is because he was acting in or directing his own pieces and didn't need to write down the stage directions. *Tennessee Williams*, on the other hand, was incredibly descriptive, outrageously prescriptive and wrote genuine essay-length stage directions! Each writer has their own style, and it is your job as the actor to know what these instructions mean and how to make them work for you on stage.

For example, below is the opening stage directions to Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* looks like this:

*“In the back, a wide doorway with curtains drawn back, leading into a smaller room decorated in the same style as the drawing-room. In the right-hand wall of the front room, a folding door leading out to the hall. In the opposite wall, on the left, a glass door, also with curtains drawn back. Through the panes can be seen part of a verandah outside, and trees covered with autumn foliage.”*



It is clear that Ibsen's stage directions from hundreds of years ago have been brought faithfully to life in this production.

Alongside these technical stage directions that deal with the practical aspects of putting on a show, playwrights will also include performative stage directions. These are often single word actions in parentheses that indicate how the playwright thinks the line should be delivered. These can completely change the meaning or subtext of a line. Examples include:

**Gavin:** I'm a golfer. I play golf.

**Melissa:** What else do you do?

**Gavin:** *(smiling)* I don't understand what you mean.

From *Party Time* by Harold Pinter.

Or try Medvedenko from Chekov's *The Seagull*:

**Medvedenko:** Why? *(Thoughtfully)* I don't understand... Your health is good, your father may not be rich, but he has all he needs. My life's far harder than yours. I make twenty-three roubles a month, that's all, not counting pension deductions, and I don't go round wearing black.

Or this interchange from Noel Coward's *Shadow Play*:

**Martha:** How much do you mind?

**Vicky:** Mind what?

*She takes the dressing-gown off the bed and goes into the bathroom, leaving the door open.*

**Martha:** *(firmly)* About Simon and Sibyl.

**Vicky:** Heart-broken, dear— *(She laughs)* You mustn't be deceived by my gay frivolity, it's really only masking agony and defeat and despair—

**Martha:** *(helping herself to a cigarette)* You're extremely irritating.

These short excerpts show how much these parantheticals add to or alter the course of the action. Smiling while saying "I don't understand what you mean" adds in a swathe of subtext that wouldn't be there otherwise.

## Costume and Character Description

Other important elements in the dramatic text are costume and character description which are related to the characters' appearance. It is what lets us know who they are and how they see themselves in the world. Sometimes a playwright will give a full character description along with a costuming one that gives you a complete picture of who this person is. In John Osbourne's *Look Back in Anger*, the protagonist Jimmy is described as follows:

“Jimmy is a tall, thin young man about twenty-five, wearing a very worn tweed jacket and flannels. Clouds of smoke fill the room from the pipe he is smoking. He is a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike. Blistering honesty, or apparent honesty, like his, makes few friends. To many he may seem sensitive to the point of vulgarity. To others, he is simply a loudmouth.”

The same can be seen in Arabic dramatic texts. For example, in his play (رأس المملوك جابر) Sa'd Allah Wenoos describes the protagonist as:

“المملوك جابر شاب تجاوز الخامسة والعشرين من عمره، معتدل القامة، شديد الحيوية يمتاز بملامح دقيقة و ذكية، في عينيه خاصة يترامى بريق نقاذ”

Description of setting is also done by using expressions like: (غرفة لهب) or (حجرة ضيقة) (مقهى شعبي) or (معتمة ذات لون قاتم).

Or describing the psychological state or facial expressions of characters, sometimes within dialogue:

(تأففاً، بدأ يغضب، ملامح وجهه تشف عن وداعة وطيبة)

Or Tone:

بصوت عال، يعلو صوته ليسيطر على الموقف

Or the destination of speech:

يوجه الكلام إلى الجمهور

Or even silence:

ويسود قليل من الصمت المتوتر

However, the literary translators should know all these types of directions and details in order to help readers or even directors or actors or even other people working in the performative task of plays to get the intended message and effect of the source text.



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