



## CULTURAL DECONSTRUCTIONS OF TRANSLATED LITERATURE

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Merely translating literal meaning from one language to another can prove difficult. However, translating literature that is written into a certain source language and that is naturally and culturally encoded into it is, in some ways, an unattainable venture.

Literature is an art that exploits words as its tool, as confined to the language, and so to the culture in which they exist: one cannot have one without the other: language is culture. Consequently, translating a culturally construed piece of art work removes it from what it is. Translation is the process of changing something into what it is not so that it will be itself - but for another audience, in another time.

Language is culture, and hence, to translate literature often means to inappropriately translate culture. As cultural interpreters, translators are the first to decide what gives literature impact in its native language, and then find some analogous way to convert that (adapting and altering) into the intended language. According to Susan Bassnet (1989), much of the outcome of cultural interpreters depends on how they understand and value not only aspects of the original work but also the work itself as a whole in its original language.

It is known that deconstruction challenges limits of language, writing and reading by pointing how the definitions of the very terms used to discuss concepts set boundaries for the specific theories they describe. Therefore, while not offering a specific cultural translation theory of its own, deconstruction does use translation often both to raise questions regarding the nature of language and *being-in-language/culture*, as well as to suggest that in the process of translating texts, one can come as close as is possible to that elusive notion or experience of (*cultural*) *différance*, which underlies their approach. Both Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida (Culler, 1979) started out in the belief that structuralist methodology could explain and examine the whole range of cause and effect through language and culture implicitly.

What transpires from deconstructionist translation theory, of course, is the renewed pre-eminence of the critic, not only as the almost divinely intuitive cultural interpreter of the literary work but also as an artist himself.

It takes art to talk about art (Lodge, 1966), that is, art cannot be paraphrased or translated into any other form. Besides, Barthes' view that it is the reader and not the author who finds meaning in a text leads logically to the conclusion that it is the translator/critic/reader that acquires the cultural meaning of a given work. The deconstructionist cultural interpreter and critic feel and describe their feelings but there is no objective standard measurement with which to state that their feelings are true or illusory. And in the end, the cultural translator is left knowing a lot about his reaction to a text, about the effect that the text had on him but somewhat less about the text itself.

The originality of the initial text is called into question and most importantly, the meaning of a text is reconsidered and silenced: the process of *cultural conversion* resists systems of categorization which separate source text from target text or language from

meaning and denies the existence of underlying forms independent of culture. (Holeton, 1992).

In *English through Translations* (2004), Croitoru mentions that in translating literary texts, both translation theories, on the one hand, and translation criticism, on the other, have to consider a criterion for the analysis of the ST and TT, covering both extralinguistic and linguistic factors that are very important in interpreting and translating the text. Due to the fact that among the most important coordinates of literary translation, intentionality determines the translator's choices, the author's intention being as important as the recipient that defines the communicative situation and the function of the text, Derrida's translation theory according to which one thinks less in terms of copying or reproducing, and more in terms of how languages relate to each other seems to apply to the culture conversion phenomenon of translating/ translated literature.

Clearly, there are many drawbacks to face with when translating literature because the material is actually a sample of the culture rendered through the language of that source text that, most often than not, does not have a correspondent into the cultural labels of the target text. For most of the cases these cultural conversions are so different from the original text that the new translated text writes back its translator as a cultural construal: the final result is a *différent* text, a culturally re-created original text subjected to a translational individuality principle and as such, basically an unrepeatable event.

In a wider sense, this re-creation of the SLT in the TL by different means, reminds of R. Jakobson's likeness in difference. The translators may have a greater or lesser degree of competence, but their work also reflects an inevitable element of subjectivity or style which can be traced through certain lexical usages and syntactic forms, development of mannerisms or a certain approach to translating, i.e. different reactions to the same text or to the contact with reality. In general, during such a cultural conversion it is impossible to observe one fundamental translation principle, namely, that the translation should accurately reflect the meaning of the original texts and nothing should be added or removed arbitrarily, though occasionally part of the meaning can be transposed.

A (cultural) recreation of the SLT would impose an interpretation of the author's universe (the denotations and the connotations of the TL and the meaning they convey) as well as a categorization of the author's universe in the TL system.

In *Contexts in Translating* (2001), E. Nida distinguishes between the referential or cognitive meaning of translation, related to the extralinguistic object in its cultural context, and the emotive meaning, related to the subjective reactions. A very important aspect in translating, interpreting and analyzing literature from a cultural standpoint is that the specific flavor of the works, the genius of the language, and the richness of the culture prevents translation operators from analyzing the specific source text characteristics, and leads to a conclusion of cultural untranslatability. In most cases, untranslatability is somehow supplemented for by invented and/or re-created constructions that would fit into the cultural background of the SL because culture is a specific collection of features which need examining in each translation situation.

Besides, deconstruction and translation prove to be inexorably interconnected, intimating that the process of translation, that elusive impossible presence Derrida refers to as *cultural différance*, may be visible: cultural interpreters are challenged to think and rethink every moment a translation solution is posed, an item named, an identity fixed or a sentence inscribed. With each naming gesture the cultural interpreter might feel compelled to provide explanations for each solution chosen. Thus, the process of cultural conversion of literary texts offers a mode of differing/deferring that subverts modes of traditional thinking. By applying the deconstructive translation method to literary texts it is possible to separate source text from target text or language from meaning: eventually, the discourse of the text reveals the *de/re-structured cultural discontinuities* as brought together under the

cover of a unified, ahistorical, transcendental, original text. In addition (im)possible meanings are returned to words, but covered up by the nature of the evolution of the discourse.

Cultural equivalence is a fluid and relative concept, for it has the notion of difference inscribed in it, alongside identity (Rosaldo, 1992). Thus, a process of cultural conversion rejects the definition of translation as transporting, reproducing, representing or communicating the meaning of the original: cultural translation/ projection is viewed as one instance in which language can be seen as always in the process of modifying the original text, of deferring and displacing for ever any possibility of grasping that which the original text desired to name.

To conclude, different approaches to culturally translated literature may have a positive or a negative feedback, i.e. the TT resulted might be original in its treatment of the translation and thus tend to break down the power of the transcendental signified and free the field from evaluating translations in terms of their proximity to pure cultural equivalence.

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### Abstract

*The article aims at investigating the translation of literature from under a cultural lens, with particular emphasis on deconstructionist translation theories, according to which not only do languages (source and target) relate to each other but also they apply to and are mediated towards an entire culture(al) conversion phenomenon.*

### Résumé

*L'article se propose d'investiguer la traduction de la littérature d'une perspective culturelle, tout en s'appuyant sur des théories de traduction déconstructivistes dont le principe fondamental est que les langues (source et cible) se trouvent dans une relation de réciprocité.*

### Rezumat

*Articolul investighează procesele de traducere ale literaturii dintr-o perspectivă culturală, acordând atenție deosebită teoriilor deconstructiviste de traducere conform cărora limbile (sursa și tinta) nu doar relatează între ele ci se și pretează unui și sunt mediate către un fenomen de conversie culturală.*