

Inevitable ageing of translations: Challenges of retranslation of literary works in Albania

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Abstract – Retranslation is not a new phenomenon, but rather widespread in various translation traditions. As languages evolve, translations become dated, which explains why literary masterpieces are «re-translated». Translations need to be contemporaneous in order to keep pace with the language level of the recipients of any generation. Albanian language has changed. It has become more open to words describing new phenomena that were missing while trying to transmit feelings, situations or events coming across in the works of greatest authors. But, should we translate the translated? This is the question. There are many pros and cons to retranslation.

Great classical writers or poets, even though translated into Albanian do not have the spirit and expressions of nowadays level of Albanian literature language, because the translation product is certainly affected by the language development of the respective translation period. Works of Shakespeare, Poe, Cervantes, Dreiser and Marquez have been translated with the potential linguistic tools of Albanian language of '20 – '30-ies in the XX-th century.

This work is an effort to provide another opinion in this respect. The analysis is focused on the ageing of previously translated texts, ideological considerations in connection with changing cultural norms and never ending search for the perfect translation. It will also list the reasons why retranslation is a necessary process.

Key Words: Re-Translation, Challenges, Albania, Literature, Language, Change

Introduction

Retranslation has a diachronic and synchronic aspect. It is widely known as an universal rule that translations get old, whereas the original remains the same. As languages evolve, translations become dated, while the retranslations are updated and enriched linguistically. Translations need to be contemporaneous in order to keep pace with the language level of the recipients of any generation. Retranslations occur mainly because of the

constant development of the target language. (Jakobson, 1959)

Translation is a “fight” between source language and target language, where at the end the target language must unveil the same values as the source language. Language transformations in the course of the years may dictate the necessity of retranslations. (Bensimon, 1990) Given the rapid change of Albanian language, especially after the change of regime, it is high time to consider retranslation of world literature masterpieces.

Albanian language has changed. It has become more open to words describing new phenomena that were missing while trying to transmit feelings, situations or events coming across in the works of greatest authors, especially after the fall of communist regime. (Kokona, 2003)

Through a literature analysis, this work tries shed light on the translation process in Albania in two particular periods: communism and democracy. The literary works taken into review are translated during the communist era and their retranslation in democracy, after the change of regime in Albania, where a lot changed regarding publications of literary works. In the XXI century there was a boom of translations and re-re-translations.

With the help of examples from translations from various authors, we will offer a panorama of the translations and re-translations in Albania. This work will mainly focus on main reasons that make retranslation of the masterpieces in Albanian language a necessity.

Retranslation is motivated by a number of translatory concerns (Collombat, 2004) among which: the ageing of previously translated texts, ideological considerations in connection with changing cultural norms and never ending search for the perfect translation. These concerns are also reflected in the translation process in Albania.

Hence, the retranslation theory shall not only focus on different historical periods, but also take into consideration different cultures and literary contexts. (Alvstad and Alexandra Assis, 2015) Or as simply as that, the reason for the retranslation might be the search for what Berman (1990) calls the "great translation".

Do retranslations improve or worsen the original? Are retranslations complete different from earlier translation? To translate the words or the spirit of a language? To translate the linguistic forms, lexical sign or the tradition codified within it? These are some of the questions faced regarding translation process in Albania.

History of translation in Albania

History of translation in Albania is not old. Most of the translations have been completed before the

Albanian Orthography Congress. (Academy of Sciences of Albania 1973). These works do not meet the standards defined in the Congress. The history of translation begins with a big number of world masterpieces translated into Albanian from scholar Fan Noli, who has used an informal Albanian language to bring these works closer to common people. This was a necessary of the period, because people were uneducated and he did the utmost to make these works understandable for the mass.

After the fall of communism, a number of Albanian writers started translating literary works, because they were among the few people who knew foreign languages. Often they did not translate these works from the original but from a second language. (Kokona 2003)

State authorities in communist period really influenced the translation process in Albania. The fact that the Albanian semiosphere (Lotman) developed from stagnation to explosion is demonstrated through emblematic translation cases. The relationship between the writer Ismail Kadare and his translator Jusuf Vrioni during the time when the control exercised by the regime had reached its harshest point is an example of this policy toward translation. There is a focus also on the feminist author-translator Diana Çuli and on the impact that her activism and her translations had during the post-communist time. Together with other young translators, Çuli has brought some of the greatest and provocative writers into the Albanian culture and has employed their motifs and themes to raise awareness on gender. (Rovena and Pema, 2018)

The fall of communist regime, which marked a change in all policies in Albania, was the start point of the retranslation process.

Other reasons that affected the translation process in Albania are:

- expiration of authors' rights,
- policy of publishing houses and profit driven motives,

- lack of experienced literary translators.

Certainly, because language is a vivid organism that changes from generation to generation, not to mention almost a century of difference, but those who have worked so hard cannot be underestimated. But, when it comes to re-translation of classics, we need to have brilliant translators, who can be at least compared to the translators who enabled us to feel the taste of the world masterpieces. Nevertheless, we do not have any guarantee that the second translation would be the best. Kokona 2003)

There are still no real translation school and literary translation is the less popular activity. Hence, literary translators chose to do this work for passion or as an enterprise to enrich Albanian culture with precious authors.

Inevitable Ageing

In all translation cultures exists the phenomenon of inevitable ageing, accompanied with a change of instruments at disposal of the translators and use technological advances.

During communist regime, majority of masterpieces were translated with the help of Albania folk language, including also some mistakes in the context.

In the translation of "Hundred years of solitude" by Marquez, we notice the translation of the word table into "sofër", a typical Turkish word, which cannot be suitable for the Latin reality.

The same contextual mistake happens with the translation of the word "pop", typical for the orthodox priest, while Latin countries are catholics.

Turkish words were very familiar in Albania during communist regime, but nowadays they are not part of the vocabulary anymore and young readers might find it difficult to understand such translations.

In existing translations, there is also a use of folk words, which are not part of the standard Albanian language and might create confusion among readers from different regions in Albania.

Regarding types of translation, we often come across with a free translation of Noli, who used re-creation, Turkish words and Southern Albanian dialect in his translations. Whereas, the famous translator Robert Shvarc used to put his body and soul into his translations, by even using re-creation type of translation.

Nevertheless, we have come across several retranslations of one novel into the Albanian language, so far, there are three translations of Ana Karenina of Tolstoy. Each of them characterized by language means used in the period they were translated and appreciated by their readers. (Limaj 2018)

From the ageing point of view, these were some of the reasons which dictate the necessity of retranslations. Nevertheless, some of these works are retranslated again in democracy.

Language Evolution

The standard language of the 1973 (Academy of Sciences, 1973) has been subject to considerable challenges regarding the linguistic forms, not to mention the fact that some translations have been realized before that period. This is a good reason leading to the necessity of re-translation and it is high time for re-translation of some works.

Albanian readers did not have the chance to enjoy J.D. Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye", because there wasn't enough material in Albanian due to rigid and framed language, but now there is a translation.

The Russian-American linguist, Roman Jakobson believes that translation is an act of communication especially between various cultures, underling that meaning of a word is a linguistic phenomenon. Using semiotics, Jakobson believes that meaning lies with the signifier and not in the signified. (Jakobson, 1959) An example of this fact is the translation of Don Quixote into Albanian, where he has even translated the names of the characters into Albanian real people. The first volume of this book is translated by Noli, whereas the second by another prominent Albanian translator Petro Zheji.

Noli's translations were an important step ahead at the time, but today the retranslation of Shakespeare's works translated by him consist of a necessity, even though it sounds like a clash with a titan.

The line of the poem "Raven" by Poe

*Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered
wean and weary,*

has several versions in Albanian language :

"Një mesnatë të bezdisur tek kndonja i zalisur"

*"Një mesnatë të zymtuar, mëndjevrarë,
shpirtlënduar"*

*"Një mesnatë të trishtuar, po mendoja i drobitur, i
dërmuar."*

all of them reflect the particularities of the time when they were translated.

Some translations include Albanian dialectic words which are not familiar to everyone and a standard language is necessary for making it clear to everyone.

The poetry of Charles Baudelaire "A une passante" translated by Noli in Albanian sounds as following :

Ja shkrep dhe u err. Moj flutur **e farosur**

Qe me veshtrimin tent me bere **flag e furre**

S'te shoh me vale vec ne jeten **e pasosur?**

The use of Southern dialect makes impossible the understanding of this translation by all readers and does not meet the norms of standard Albanian language.

Meanwhile the famous saying "Të rroç a të mos rroç, kjo është çështja" translated with the help of the category of participle which in Albanian has been eliminated and is not used anymore, creates an ontological clash in meaning related to the verbs "to be/ to live", accompanied with a Southern dialect form.

There were numerous translations not from the original, which were then adapted by respective translators with Turkish and folk words.

"Një arixhi trupmadh, me një mjekër të kreshpëruar e me ca gishtërinj si kthetër harabeli, që u paraqit me emrin Melhiades, **ia ekspozoi miletit** të fshatit atë që ai e quante **mrekullinë e tetë dijetarëve** alkimistë të Maqedonisë."

Prandaj edhe **jabanxhinjtë** ishin të vetmit që e kuptonin arsyen, pse ai djaloshi që pat qenë komandant i trupprojës, kishte vdekur nga sevdaja. (pg 180)

...mëngjesin e Vitit të Ri, e gjetën të vdekur nga **sevdaja** poshtë dritares së saj. (pg 228)

dhe vërtet, nuk kaloi shumë kohë dhe ajo i tregoi të atit se kishte rënë në **sevda**. (pg 268)

Good literary works are written in powerful language and are psychologically penetrating. Different translators, no matter the time or historical periods, first as readers of the original work, may have different interpretations of the same work. Better or worse.

For example in the dramatic loss of the thrilling lines of Poe in the Raven

*And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each
purple curtain
Thrilled me- filled me with fantastic terrors never
felt before;*

*Era frynte qe perjashta,
Rrihte perdet e mendafshhta
Dhe me ngjethte dhe me derthte
Tmerre qe s'i ndjeva kurre.*

Translated with a uniform language that does not transmit the spirit of the original.

Another issue is the translation of these works from a second language, not the original. The translator must drink spring water, not the water coming from a secondary resource.

Ideological views

State-owned publishing houses used to censor the translation of several works, due to ideology of the communist regime. Some works have not been translated into Albanian in their complete form.

Due to ideological views, the Tess of Débervilles has been shortened. There are 20 pages missing, removed due to some religious point of views. The same happened to other classics, such as the Picture of Dorian Grey by Oscar Wilde, as well as other authors such as Kafka, Proust, Wild, Kamy, Sartre, Beckett e Ionesco; Borghese, Sabatto, Babel, Bell, Hesse, Grass or Bulgakov.

In Alice Adventures in the Wonderland, the name Alice was translated as Liza, a typical Albanian version, to avoid foreign influence in Albanian society of that period

D.H.Lawrence in Lady's Chatterley Lover, according to authorities was trying to put primitive instincts into words, while Ulysses of Joyce was removed from bookstores because authorities did not like the translation. This is not because there was a problem with translators but because of the censure.

Genius of Dreiser was forbidden due to its erotic sections and sensual words. Dreiser used to disclose, while communist regime tried to cover everything. This work was translated again after the '90-ies because that version had nothing to do with the original.

Madam Bovary is missing some parts due to the tabu actions and languages used in this work, the same is also valid for "Metamorphosis" and works of Virginia Woolf, who consciences and philosophical ideas were too vanguard for that period.

Some world classics which include religious views have been shortened or translated in a different way, due to the problems of the regime with religious beliefs. This is the case of Cathedral of Paris by Victor Hugo, where entire chapters are missing in the Albanian translation.

Discussions and Results

But, is there an «ideal» translation? (Eco 2006)

The necessity of re-translation of the world literature masterpieces becomes more obvious when this classical culture of new and old times needs to have a more vivid communication with the source culture.

Re-translation is like re-playing a classical symphony from an orchestra with new instruments. It seems like they make it more vital and becomes popular even among young people. Indeed, Albanian translations of the communist era did not resist time and publishing policies that needed to fill the extraordinary cultural emptiness of this period.

It is true that during the communist regime were no real literary translators and this role was filled by famous writers and scholars, who were the most educated people of that period. They were like a window to the real world for Albanian readers.

There were several attempts to retranslate some of these works, but they were accompanied with the problematics of the period. But, nowadays it is high time to reconsider this phenomenon and relevant authorities are taking some initiatives in this respect.

Conclusions

All the literary translations covered with the ideals of the time need to be unveiled, so that Albanian people could enjoy them same as other readers all over the world.

However, there are numerous debates surrounding the re-translation of literary classics. Nevertheless, the re-translation issue is complex and needs to be reviewed in several aspects and a 50 year span is often depicted as the "best-before-date" of translations.

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