NEWS TRANSLATION AS REWRITING WITH A *SKOPOS*

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Abstract: *This article purports to iterate the constant need of the journalists to shape and rewrite sources texts according to the expectations of the target audience and the journalistic practices of particular news agencies, which may result in the production of texts that are different from what the original was meant to be. These decisions are often motivated by what functionalist approaches call the skopos theory. Adjusting world events to a national reality is a frequently met practice in journalism and it should be regarded merely as a way of enriching the linguistic tools that journalists have at hand.*

Key-words: *news translation, skopos, rewriting, refraction, target audience*

Translation plays a central role in mediating understanding between different modernities and experiences of globalisation around the planet, although Translation Studies is a relatively recent field of research that needs further investigation, especially from a journalistic perspective. The best term to describe what happens inside the intricate machinery of news translation is *transediting*, provided by Karen Stetting (University of Copenhagen) in 1989, who considered it "a new term for coping with the grey area between editing and translating" (Stetting cited in Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 63). This concept resumes the efforts of the translators to edit and incorporate cultural and situational variations inside their productions, transediting being widely used in film and TV translations, written journalism, TV interviews, company and institutional brochures and PR material. Transediting can be described in this context as a solution of compromise between two different, but closely intertwined fields of research, i.e. translation and journalism. Thus, from a journalistic perspective, news translation relates primarily to the processes of rewriting, reshaping, reformulating and reorganising the sources texts for the target readers.

We can trace examples of rewriters all throughout history, from the Greek slave putting together anthologies of the Greek classics to the Renaissance scholars collating manuscripts with the purpose of publishing both Roman and Greek classics. Around 1545, Jacques Peletier du Mans called translation "the truest kind

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of imitation" (cited in Hermans 1985: 103), although, according to the general view among Renaissance writers, in so far as translation and imitation were considered in conjunction, translation was, at best, "a particular and restricted form of imitation" (1985: 103). In his turn, the translator was one who, in rhetorical terms, subjected himself "not only to someone else's *inventio* but also to the *dispositio* and, as far as he can, to the *elocutio* of the original authors' work" (1985: 104).

Not long after Peletier, Du Bellay admitted in 1549 the limited role of literal translation in the dissemination of knowledge, but he absolutely denied that translation could play a part in the growth of literature or the enrichment of the vernacular. In his opinion, translation was not able to keep alive that spirit called by the Romans "genius", a translator being, thus, "like a painter who can depict a person's body but not his soul" (1985: 104).

In the past, as it happens in the present, rewriters created images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre or even a whole literature. These images used to coexist with the realities they competed with, but soon the images tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities. And so they do now. According to Shuttleworth and Cowie (cited in Dimitriu 2006: 68), "rewriting refers to a range of (intra or interlingual, o.n.) processes, including translation, which can be said to re-interpret, alter or manipulate an original text in some way".

Probably one of the first statements of the "doctrine" of rewriting in Western literature can be attributed to Saint Augustine. According to André Lefevere (1992), Saint Augustine impersonates the archetype of the rewriter primarily because of the position he occupied within a certain institution (as all rewriters do). Hence, he was interested in preserving that ideology and in combating rival ideologies. Other types of rewriters are those working at courts, in educational institutions or publishing houses (and, we may add, editorial offices). While some rewritings may be inspired by "ideological motivations or produced under ideological constraints, depending on whether the rewriters find themselves in agreement with the dominant ideology of their time or not", other rewritings "are inspired by poetological motivations, or produced under poetological constraints" (Lefevere 1992: 7).

In *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, André Lefevere himself defines the image of literary works, authors and cultures as "the projection of any work or author into a given culture, which frequently exerts more influence than the original has had in its own culture" (1992: 110).

As nowadays people are more inclined to be exposed to rewritings (especially in what concerns the international section of a national newspaper) than to originals, we could also talk, in Lefevere's words, about *refractions*, which define those texts processed for specific target audiences or "adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology" (Dimitriu 2006: 67). Whereas the conservative translator simply works on the level of the word or the sentence, Frere's "Spirited Translator", employs, on the contrary, "the corresponding modern phrases; but he is apt to imagine that a peculiar liveliness and vivacity may be imparted to his

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performance by the employment of such phrases as are particularly connected with modern manners" (Lefevere 1992: 50) and it works on the level of culture.

If translations are no longer reflections of the original, but a distorted product, do we have a case of *traduttore traditore*? A.S. Way gives the following explanation in relation to the translations of the Greek classics:

The *traduttore*, then, who would not willingly be a *traditore*, may not exscind or alter, but he may well so translate, where possible, that, while the (incorruptible) scholar has the stern satisfaction of finding that nothing has been shirked, the reader who does not know the Greek may pass unsuspectingly over not a few unsavoury spots – not that his utmost endeavours can make his author suitable for reading (aloud) in a ladies' school. (Lefevere 1992: 45, the authors' emphasis)

Recent studies agree that in journalism, in particular, the principle of fidelity no longer applies. Bielsa and Bassnett (2009) point out that the former central importance of authorship (reflected in the sacrality of the original text) is a product of the autonomy of the literary field does not have a counterpart in the journalistic field, which is highly heteronomous:

The news translator, unlike the literary translator, does not owe respect and faithfulness to the source text but is able to engage in a significantly different relationship with an often unsigned piece of news, the main purpose of which is to provide information of an event in a concise and clear way. (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 65)

Along the same line

In the case of a news translator, and specifically of a translator who works in a news agency, what is characteristic is that faithfulness to the original text is subordinated to faithfulness to the narrated facts, which on some occasions and whenever there exists a clear justification allows for the introduction of alterations of meaning, which are intolerable to a translator specialized in other fields; that is to say, it obliges the translator to combine his translating task with the task of a journalistic editor. (Pablo García Suárez cited in Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 65)

Postmodern theories have replaced the invisibility of the translator (which is the mark of a faithful translation) with the image of the visible interventionist. Hence, translation ceased to be a faithful reproduction of the original and has turned into a "deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration and fabrication – and even, in some cases of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes" (Tymoczko and Gentlzler cited in Schäffner and Bassnett 2010: 12)

From a journalistic point of view, the first process of news rewriting takes place inside the news agency itself in order to achieve accuracy and improve the form of the text by checking the spelling of proper names, the exact names of the institutions, the punctuation or the involuntary repetitions. This polishing or

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"treatment" of the initial news material can not be considered alteration – because the data are neither changed, nor deleted – but rather a completion of the source material (Popescu 1992: 19).

When analysing the ways in which international news is transformed from English into Finnish based on a corpus of articles comprising 14 Reuters source texts and 14 FNA (Finish News Agency) target texts, Hursti (2001) discovered that before a piece of international news reaches the Finnish consumers, it is previously submitted to several text processing stages which involve editing, translation and gatekeeping (relying solely on selection). In fact, all the news material coming from the global news agencies (in this case, Reuters) is equally subject to reorganisation, deletion, addition and substitution:

A very common procedure in news translation, reorganisation was found in all 14 texts, at all textual levels, ranging from the precision permutation of individual lexical items to extensive revamps of information at wider textual levels. While some of the decisions to reorganize the TTs were no doubt due to differences between the Finnish and English languages, most of them were motivated by more conscious decisions to refocus the TTs to better serve the needs of the receiving audience.[2]

The journalists may omit entire paragraphs or simply individual lexical items, elements such as "references to sources, time and place adverbials, and other types of information deemed unnecessary" (Hursti 2001) being most of the times deleted. On the other hand, journalists may also add information that is not even present in the source text, especially in the case of culture-specific additions used to better explain certain details or concepts that have unique references in the source culture.

But since news translation is a target-oriented process that operates according to a set of norms and conventions appropriate to the target readers, it means it is a form of human action that takes into account the function performed by the translated text for the target receivers in the target language and culture. In Translation Studies, functionalist approaches also define this as the translation *skopos*, a term coined by Hans Vermeer, who strongly believes that the intended purpose of the target texts determines the translation methods and strategies chosen by the translator when rendering the source text in the target language (Dimitriu 2002: 55). The *skopos* theory is, in its turn, governed by two rules, the coherence rule – according to which the target text "should be coherent with the target receiver's situation" (2002: 55) – and the fidelity rule – which refers to the intertextual coherence between translation and source text. Despite the interest shown by functionalist approaches in the target text functions and orientations, they never lose sight of the source, and we may say that both the above mentioned rules would normally apply to news translation since journalists are more inclined to produce instrumental translations (cf. Christiane Nord), so that the translated/edited

[2] Kristian Hursti, "An Insider's View on Transformation and Transfer in International News Communication: An English-Finnish Perspective", 2001, http://blogs.helsinki.fi/hes-eng/volumes/volume-1-special-issue-on-translation-studies/an-insiders-view-on-transformation-and-transfer-in-international-news-communication-an-english-finnish-perspective-kristian-hursti/

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articles read as originals[3]. Thus, news agencies may choose to add a certain amount of background information in order to suit the needs and expectations of the receiving audience, a practice neither rare, nor condemnable.

Before proceeding to the translation of a piece of news, the journalist must first of all pay attention to the internal and external constraints that regulate the process of news production itself, because as random as information filtering may seem to those who are not trained as journalists, this process is influenced by the nature of the news, the status of the publication, the way in which news are constructed, by ethics, by modifications that may appear in the psycho-moral profile of the audience, and so on. Consequently, "the journalistic text can not be conceived outside a planned activity performed by the sender-journalist, with the purpose of drawing and preserving the interest of the recipient" (Coman 2009: 112, my translation).

As a final remark, although readers might not be aware of all the transformations undergone by source texts at sentence, semantic and linguistic level, being satisfied with the end product (i.e. the article) and not wanting to know more about the process itself, more consideration has to be paid to the complex task of a journalist working inside an editorial office because (s)he is able to recreate a text and to turn it into his/her own creation. We can also say that, most of the times, the journalists are rewriters whose texts function as originals in the target culture. Thus, translation enhances diversity because of the wide range of texts it provides within a culture, and raises awareness of the existence of other cultures and languages, preserving at the same time the mechanisms of the target language.

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[3] See Rodica Dimitriu, *Theories and Practice of Translation*, Iaşi: Institutul European, 2002, p. 56.

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