SOME INSIGHTS INTO THE MIND-SET OF A TRANSLATOR

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the issue of the identity or the mind-set of the translator. We will try to defend the idea according to which the personality and professionalism of a translator is able to put a work up or put it down, to give it credit or to discredit it in the eyes of the receivers of the message.

Keywords: translator's adaptability, translator mind-set, responsibility, skills and imperatives

Motto:
The translator should be transparent just like a window,
so that we won't even suspect his existence."[2]

We have read a lot, even written a little, about who the translator is, what the translator has to, needs to and, last but not least, does do. We have agreed upon the fact that he is courageous and daring enough to venture in the very demanding job of translation. We have provided enough arguments to underline how important and challenging the job of a translator is, how he is caught, somehow, between the source text and the target text, between the faithfulness to the sense or to the form, thus being a *slave to two masters*[3]. Having done so, we feel like we owe it to the translator to try and take a peek into his mind.

Just like any other professional, the translator needs to be a master. Of words, of languages, of cultures the languages belong to. This is not an easy task, nor a light responsibility, on the contrary. Whether we refer to the translator of written text, or the translator of spoken speech, (the interpreter), this professional needs to develop a specific mind-set. Besides the specific knowledge and skills that he needs to master, dealing with at least two separate languages, handling written and/or speaking skills, he would have to possess certain psychological features to help him manage sometimes stressful situations. It has been overly debated upon the idea that the translator (interpreter) is considered a *slave to two masters*, which, somehow leads us to believe that he is exposed to a two-folded stress. Marina Vazaca[4], just like the others before her, from Antoine Berman to Dan Culcer, considers that the translator is somehow dually pledged to the fidelity towards the language he translates from, the source language on the one hand and towards the spirit of his own language, the target language, on the other hand.

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[2] Gogol, cited by Hertha Perez, in *Dinamica traducerilor*, from Cronica 16 nr 43, 1981, p. 10

[3] F. Rosenzweig, uses the metaphor 'slave of two masters', (paraphrased from Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la Traduction,* Bayard, 2004, translation and introductory study by Jeanrenaud, Magda, *Despre traducere,* Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2005, pp. 66 – 68)

[4] In *Pretul dorintei de a traduce,* from *Romania Libera*, nr. 8/29 feb. 2008, p. 3, quoted in B.-O. Han, *On Translation : communication, controversy, cultural globalisation*, Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior", Târgu-Mureș, 2011, p. 139

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Thus, the mind of the translator needs to wrap around writer/speaker intent *and* reader/listener needs. He needs to handle words and manage meanings to such an extent that the outcome flows as smoothly as possible, having as single 'imperative' the need to make the translation appear as if written in the target language, to make the translation breathe as if the original, to make the receivers forget that the product they are reading/listening to is, actually, a translation, a 'transdaptation' of an original. "It has, thus, become very clear that the task of the translator is by far an easy one, since, as it appears, he has to act like a pacifier, judge of good taste, endorser of certain terms that seek to enter the language, link between languages and the cultures behind them, why not, even marketing manager or PR officer in some cases."[5]

We have already agreed upon the prerogatives that a translator needs to achieve. To the fact that translation is an outside and inside type of job. Outside, since it deals with the client's material, to a text already tailored by a writer/speaker and an inside job, since it deals with the hidden meanings the material enclosures. Supporting the same idea, Ana Cartianu[6] chose to clear things up from the point of view of the translator, in her essay which appeared in *Secolul XX*[7]: „The activity of the translator is a labour which implies patience, scrupulosity and devotion as well as inspiration and imagination. Besides the cultural horizon and linguistic competence, it requires some sort of a dual personality on the part of the translator. On the one hand, he carefully sets down, in order to confer as accurate as possible the intention, structure and language of the original, without harming the linguistic strata, the nerve, clear nature and the rhythm of the original style; on the other hand, by discovering new lexical, structural and idiomatic equivalences, and by use of phantasy and poetic feeling, he becomes the creator in a different register, on a different scale, of the original symphony."

In her essay *To be a good translator*[8], Leila Razmjou debates upon certain skills and qualities one needs to become a good translator. Thus, we find that "the first step is extensive reading of different translations of different kinds of texts, since translating requires active knowledge, while analysing and evaluating different translations requires passive knowledge." Of no lesser importance is the translator's need to "read different genres in both source and target languages including modern literature, contemporary prose, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, announcements, instructions, etc. Being familiar with all these genres is important, since they implicitly transfer culture-specific aspects of a language. Specialised readings are also suggested: reading recently published articles and journals on theoretical and practical aspects of translation."[9]

[5] B.-O. Han, *op. cit.*
[6] idem
[7] In *Din unghiul traducatorului,* din Secolul XX nr 1,2,3/1980, pp. 213-215
[8] Acc. to Leila Razmjou in *To be a good translator,*
http://translationjournal.net/journal/28edu.htm
[9] idem

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We have, thus, figured out how challenging the task of translators really is, how it appeals to all senses and how important it is for them to be able to adjust to all types of materials in order to ensure appropriate outcomes.

The mind of a translator is always going to be somehow haunted by the original and the product of his translation, always going to be torn between choices he would have to make. Needless to say how stressful and daunting deadlines and other such externally-imposed factors can be for a translator and time-limitation, speed and memory for an interpreter.

Reading about what a translator is, one may encounter some rather mean (dis)considerations, according to which a translator is not much than a second-hand writer, a transporter of words that have already been priory imagined and uttered by someone else. Truth be told, we can accept the idea that translation is like "food already chewed on, to be served to the one who cannot chew by himself and that such a food does not taste the same as the original one"[10] but, this does not undermine and annul the importance of the task and the huge amount of responsibility that is left on the translator's shoulders.

They ought to master, besides the immediate and surface meanings of words they need to deal with, also the hidden from the eye, deeper meanings. "Moreover, translators should have a good ear for both source and target languages; i.e. they should be alert to pick up various expressions, idioms, and specific vocabulary and their uses. (…) This is in fact what we call improving one's intuition. Intuition is not something to be developed in a vacuum; rather, it needs practice and a solid background. It needs both the support of theory and the experience of practice. Language intuition is a must for a competent translator."[11]

Indeed, translators need to be intuitive, resourceful and able to empathise.

> "One of the most important points to consider in the act of translating is understanding the value of the source text within the framework of the source-language discourse. To develop this understanding, the translator must be aware of the cultural differences and the various discoursal strategies in the source and target languages. Therefore, the hidden structure of the source text should be discovered through the use of various discoursal strategies by the translator. A good translator should be familiar with the culture, customs, and social settings of the source and target language speakers. She should also be familiar with different registers, styles of speaking, and social stratification of both languages."[12]

This only proves that the task of translators is performing well-defined and well-refined jobs, which require specific and neatly aimed at abilities to handle certain terms and terminological items.

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[10] Kumarajiva, translator of Budist texts in Chinese, quoted by Andrei Bantaş, Elena Croitoru, *Didactica Traducerii,* Teora Publishing House, Bucharest 1999, pg. 7

[11] Razmjou, L. *Developing Guidelines for a New Curriculum for the English Translation, Translation Journal,* V. 6, No.2. 2002. http://accurapid.com/journal/20edu1.htm

[12] Acc. to Leila Razmjou in *To be a good translator,* http://translationjournal.net/journal/28edu.htm

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On the other hand, the translator needs to make a priority out of the ability to understand the techniques the writer/speaker used in order to produce the original material. Further on, he ought to find the ability to render words in an artistic manner, as close to the original as possible. "But, we stand before a translator who deals with very different authors, texts, styles, literary periods, lexical terms, registers, even readers. This means that he, indeed, has to become a chameleon, in order to be able to approach every new original material with the same responsibility and professionalism."[13] Bantaş draws our attention upon this tight relationship between the writer and the translator of his work: „the translator ought to respect, listen to and not betray his superior (recte the author) since he willingly engaged in his service." [14]

We consider it safe by now to state that the job of a translator is endowed with the power to put a work up or to put it down, to give it credit or to discredit it. It is the personality of the translator, the professionalism of the one handling the linguistic and cultural items that make the difference. A good translator can bring into the spotlight a piece of art that has not had the 'opportunity' to have been written in a language of international circulation, this not meaning that it is worthless, nonetheless. "One might even argue that up to a certain degree, the author is introduced to the world of the readers by the ability and talent of the translator. In his article, Romul Munteanu[15] considers that we can unfortunately find several cases in which great (Romanian or foreign) writers do not benefit from a well-deserved acknowledgment or from the adequate aesthetic credit, on account of some precarious translations. Thus, the translation of literary works constitutes a form of art by means of which the talent of the translator mediates the circulation of another talent (i.e. the writer's)."[16]

Last, but not least, we ought to refer to the recently developed trend in translation, the use of CAT tools, since, as shown in a previously published article[17] "the translation process is now enhanced, aided, supported by technological devices, i.e. special kind of software. These software programmes are such designed as to provide valuable assistance to the translator, which, needless to say does not mean to do the work instead of the translator." Therefore, besides all the abilities and skills that a translator needs to handle, there is this technical one, which does not prove too easy, nonetheless. Yet, professional translators would not disregard necessity to master such a skill, since it only comes to help and aid their work.

Several facets of the personality of the translator have been approached here, yet, we agree that there are still ideas to be pinned down regarding the subject. One, among more, thing is for sure, though, the translator is a time- and energy-consuming job, one that requires language and culture knowledge, patience and empathy, inspiration and

[13] B.-O. Han, *op. cit.*, p. 146
[14] In *Ancheta Familiei – Traducerea - o aventura a spiritului* from Familia 16 nr. 4, 1980, pg. 4.
[15] In *Permanenta Imbogatire a Cunoasterii*, from Contemporanul, nr. 39 (1976)/1984, pg. 12
[16] B.-O. Han, *op. cit.*, p. 137
[17] Studia Philologia Universitatis Petru Maior, http://www.upm.ro/cercetare/studia%20website/Studia%2019.2015.pdf, p. 124

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hardwork. "Finally, it is important to know that it takes much more than a dictionary to be a good translator, and translators are not made overnight. To be a good translator requires a sizeable investment in both source and target languages. It is one of the most challenging tasks to switch safely and faithfully between two universes of discourse."[18]

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[18] Acc. to *Leila Razmjou,* op. cit.

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