Is translation always an intercultural process?

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Procesos interculturales de Asia Oriental en la sociedad internacional de la información: ciudadanía, género y producción cultural

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Introduction

• Starting point: **Is translation always an intercultural process?** → Is there always the same degree of linguistic and cultural material exchange?
  – Beliefs about the original text and the function attributed to literature
  – Power relations between cultures in contact
  – Target culture norms about translation
  – Ethics of translation
Theoretical and methodological framework

• Literary work as a document or a piece of art?
  – non-literary motivation → window onto contemporary events and society (learning about the Other)
  – aesthetic or entertainment values (literary enjoyment)

• Translator’s *invisibility* (Venuti, 1995):
  – Make the pages flow, reads as if it was an original

• *Domestication* of the text (Venuti, 1995):
  – re-modelled (distorted) to fit target culture
Theoretical and methodological framework

• Ethnocentric perception or ethnorelative approach to the Other?
  – denying or minimising differences
  – finding ways of adapting or integrating them

• Translation project motivated by an ethics of sameness or difference (Venuti, 1998):
  – Foreign texts are rewritten to conform to styles and themes prevailing in domestic literatures to enable readers’ self-recognition
  – Domesticating the texts to some extent, but at the same time representing the diversity
Theoretical and methodological framework

• Analysis of texts and paratexts:
  – Texts (original + 3 translations).
  – Paratexts are those productions that surround the text and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, i.e. to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its “reception” and consumption in the form of a book. (Genette, 1997: 1)
    • Peritexts: covers, preface, titles, typography…
    • Epitexts: interviews, reviews, e-mails, blogs…

• How is the book offered to the public
The object of study

• Chun Sue’s (春树) *Beijing wawa* (北京娃娃) (2002).

• *La muñeca de Pekín* (Pérez, Shan y Canales) (2003)

• *La nina de Pequín* (Rovira) (2003)

• *Beijing Doll* (Goldblatt) (2004)
The object of study

- Women’s life writing:
  - literature is a way of self-expression, used as a process of discovering and self-assertion;
  - constructs a gendered identity around her literary and musical preferences, as well as her social net (youth punk subculture);
  - critical and subversive of China’s mainstream ideologies and institutions → her writing becomes a site of ideological struggle towards the dominant culture.
The object of study

• Idiolect characterised by a hybrid language:
  – fresh, direct and ready to take-away street language;
  – quotes from the Chinese classics.

• The text is largely composed of directly or indirectly quoted conversations and the first person narrative hardly distinguishable in style from the dialogues.

• Highly heterodox in its paratextual presentation
  → Bits of her life in the form of excerpts from her diary, photos, e-mails, handwritten poems...
The English text tends to adapt, paraphrase or omit Chinese cultural and intertextual referents as well as linguistic puns and swear words.
Textual and paratextual analysis

• Information found in the cover:
  – Author’s pen name (春树)
  – Title (北京娃娃)
  – Subtitle (十七岁少女的残酷青春自白)
  – Subtitle in English (I, Seventeen, Badness Gire) [sic]
  – Name of the publisher (远方出版社)
Textual and paratextual analysis

- Author’s English pen name (Chun Sue)
- Title (Beijing Doll)
- Subtitle (A novel) → change in genre
- Laudatory quotation from Asian Weekly (“Reveals the cruel youth of a new generation... uncensored, raw and bloody.”)
- Designed to domesticate the product (calls for reminiscences of an identifiable musical referent).
Textual and paratextual analysis

- Author’s English pen name (Chun Sue)
- Title (La nina de Pequín)
- Name of the publisher (Empúries)
- Name of the series (Narrativa) → change in genre
Textual and paratextual analysis

- Author’s English pen name (Chun Sue)
- Comment about the book (El relato autobiográfico de una joven rebelde. Un canto al espíritu punk y la búsqueda del placer).
- Title (La muñeca de Pekín/北京娃娃) → bilingual
- Name of the publisher (El Aleph)
Textual and paratextual analysis

• Original back cover:
  – Text almost totally coincident with the book’s preface.

• English translation back cover:
  – Press quotations with laudatory comments about the book (Time, Asian Weekly and Inter Press Service).
  – Presentation of the book (Banned in China for its candid exploration of a young girl’s sexual awakening… This headline-making autobiographical novel…).
  – Translator’s name (Howard Goldblatt)
  – Publisher’s name (Riverhead Books)
  – Genre indication (Fiction) → change of genre
Textual and paratextual analysis

- Catalan translation back cover:
  - Reminder of author’s English pen name (Chun Sue)
  - Reminder of book’s title (La nina de Pequín)
  - Translator’s name (Sara Rovira)
  - Publisher’s name (Empúries)
  - Name of the series (Narrativa, 219) → change of genre
  - Presentation of the book (La nina de Pequín és una novel·la transgressora que ha estat prohibida a la Xina. (...) De resultes de la seva gosadia, Chun Sue té avui prohibit sortir de la Xina).
Textual and paratextual analysis

• Spanish translation back cover:
  – Reminder of book’s title in Chinese (北京娃娃)
  – Name of the series and publisher’s name (Modernos y clásicos de El Aleph)
  – Presentation of the book (En clave autobiográfica, La muñeca de Pekín relata las andanzas de una adolescente rebelde y da voz a una nueva generación que busca amor y libertad en un entorno de alienación urbana y placeres efímeros).
## Textual and paratextual analysis

### Ortotypographical aspects

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<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>CATALAN</th>
<th>SPANISH</th>
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<td>Pictures, e-mails, handwritten poems, diary excerpts, etc.</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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</tbody>
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Textual and paratextual analysis
Internet as a site for self-expression

• Interesting to examine how she uses cyberspace as a site to construct her own identity and to explore social relationships.

• Chun Sue’s life is still unfolding and her self-understanding constantly changing as she engages in the act of writing → shares her writings, pictures and the music she likes with her friends and virtual admirers.

Conclusions

• Anglo-American culture sees the literary text as a piece of art:
  – The translation has to read fluently as if it were originally written in English
  – The translator has to be invisible
  – Ethics of sameness
  – Domesticate the text to fit anglo culture and conform it to domestic aesthetic values and agendas
Conclusions

• Distortion of the original’s identity through the process of translation:
  – Autobiography $\rightarrow$ fiction / novel
  – Multicultural character $\rightarrow$ Monocultural
  – Transgressive in content and form $\rightarrow$ conservative
  – Heterodox format (collage style) $\rightarrow$ orthodox

• The ethics of translation behind the English translation silences the author’s voice, both the verbal and non-verbal $\rightarrow$ much less cultural exchange.
References

