TRANSLATOR AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL MEDIATOR: SEMOTIC APPROACH

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Abstract - We can expect a broad definition of discourse. The last decades have seen a great increase in focusing on literary discourse and consequently its socio-cultural dimensions. Meanwhile, in translation studies field, very few studies (Troque, 2015) considered the translator as a socio-cultural mediator involved in translation procedure and the way he/she is affecting the aesthetic-affective charge of the literary discourse. So, this paper discussed the socio-cultural features as factors underlying almost all literary texts and explored their translation; both limitations and potentials and how these elements influence the reception of the readers, aesthetically and emotionally. To this end, some parts of a poem by Sohrab Sepehri (1928-1980), cotemporary Iranian poet, along with its English and French translations were comparatively verified. The results were presented through tensive model (Fontanille & Zilberberg, 1998) a device used in post-Greimasian semiotics. The semiotic approach to socio-cultural features of literary discourse and translation delivers valuable results in terms of assessment of translation and translator training.

Index Terms- Literary translation; socio-cultural features, affective load, aesthetics, translation assessment, Sohrab Sepehri.

I. INTRODUCTION

"Discourse refers to socially shared habits of thought, perception, and behavior reflected in numerous texts belonging to different genres" (Scollon and Suzanne, 2003). It is shaped and developed in a socio-cultural context that influences all its aspects. A text as Martin (2007) believes, "is a passage of discourse" which is produced in an interactive process in which the producers need to posses several types of communicative knowledge including expresive and social knowledge (Schiffrin and Deborah, 2007). Literary text particulary, can be considered as a discourse full of social, local and cultural aspects which can be shaped by its own context. Therefore, the role of the translator of the literary texts is not just a linguistic mediator who finds a linguistic equivalent for the words and phrases, but also a cultural mediator who tries to facilate the perception of the situation in which the text is generated for the readers and also to fine tune the translated text with the cultural beliefs of the readers. According to Bassnett and Lefevere (1990, p. 10) "There is always a context in which the translation takes place, always a history from which a text emerges and into which a text is transposed. […] [T]ranslation as an activity is always doubly contextualized, since the text has a place in two cultures". Furthermore, all these socio-cultural elements play a decisive role in creating the aesthetic-affective load of the original texts; their translation, therefore, is important to generate the same aesthetic-affective value in the target language with its proper culture and social specificities. Thus, the researchers of the current study aim to investigate the role of the translator as a socio-cultural mediator in English and French translation of Sohrab Sepehri's poems. Through applying the tensive model, proposed by Jacques Fontanille and Claude Zilberberg (1998), the two translations are schematized and compared qualitatively with the original text. To conduct the study, the following research question is posed:
Q: To what extent do the translation of socio-cultural features, inherited in literary discourse can affect the aesthetic-affective reception of the translators and consequently the readers?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Discourse and Text

According to Mumby and Stohl (1991), as cited in Mey (2001, p.793), the word "discourse" refers to "the ensemble of phenomena in and through which social production of meaning takes place". Mey sees a text as a social product which is created by the speakers of a society with a specific social condition. These speakers share some social knowledge which is also known as "mutual knowledge" (Bloor and Bloor, 2007). This shared knowledge which is the result of issues such as identity and power, and also the value system of a social group has been categorized by Bloor and Bloor (2007, p.18) into seven categories:

- knowledge of certain facts relating to subject matter;

- Wide cultural knowledge, ranging from understanding of major celeberatory, festivals, religious and/or ethical custums, to the legal system;
- Knowing how people behave with respect to their social roles within social hierarchies;
- Knowledge of the institutional practice of specialist discourse communities, such as workplace groups, schools, government, clubs and societies and their related genres;
- Knowledge of the moral values of the groups to which the participents belong;
- Knowledge of the co-text and context in a specific communicative event;
- Knowledge of the individuals involved as discourse participants in the immediate communicative event.

Martin (2001) also sees "text" as a passage of discourse "which is coherent in these two regards: it is coherent with respect to the context of situation, and therefore consistent in register; and it is coherent with respect to itself, and therefore cohesive" (p.63). The production of coherent discourse, as Schiffrin (2001) describes, is an interactive process which requires speakers to draw upon several different kinds of communicative knowledge such as expressive and social knowledge, "the ability to use language to display personal and social identities, to convey attitudes and perform actions, and to negotiate relationships between self and other" (p.54).

Literary Texts

As sugested by Reiss (1977), cited in Munday (2001), there are four types of text: informative, expressive, operative, and audio-medial. Among these, expressive type of text, defined by her as creative composition in which the author uses the aesthetic dimension of language, best matches the poems and other literary texts. On the other side, literature is descibed as the expression of a particular national or cultural tradition by Quinn (2006, p.102). There, he claims that in traditional literary studies, culture is considered the "background" to literature, "important but subsidiary to the text itself" (ibid.). In modern literary studies, however, the socio-cultural features of the text gain the same attention as the decontextualised text does.

Literary Translation

Translation of a literary text, as an example of a socio-cultural discourse requires many condiderations. One of these issues is translationg realia which are mostly found in literary texts. According to Vlakhov and Florin (1970) as cited in Dictionary of Translation Studies (p. 139-140), "Realia are textual elements which provide local and historical colour". They define realia as "words (and collocations) of a national language which denote objects, concepts and phenomena characteristic of the geographical surroundings, culture, everyday realities or socio-historical specifics of a people, nation, country or tribe, and which thus convey national, local or historical colour; such words have no exact equivalents in other languages" (1970:438,translated). So, translation of a poetic discourse requires a deep knowledge of social and cultural context of both the source and target languages.

III. METHOD

To answer the research question, a poem by a notable Iranian contemporary poet Sohrab Sepehri (1928-1980) with the corresponding translations in English and French was selected. The two English and French versions of the original, from a translational perspective were verified: Syntactic, lexical, and Socio-cultural elements and phenomenological aspects. Their aesthetic-affective values were compared with the ones of original. Applying Tensive Model, the researchers attempt to schematize the literary translation. The Tensive model which is proposed by Fontanille and Zilberberg (1998) is a device applied by post-Greimasian semioticians. In this model, as mentioned by Hébert, "any given value is constituted by combining two "valencies" (or dimensions): intensity and extensity. Extensity is the range over which intensity applies; it corresponds to quantity, variety, and the spatial or temporal range of phenomena. Intensity and extensity are each subject to variation on a continuous scale from zero to the maximum (or even infinity)".

The Tensive model is generally represented visually by a graph: intensity is placed on the vertical and extensity on the horizontal axe. On this graph, any given phenomenon may occupy one or more positions. Two kinds of correlations exist between intensity and extensity. The correlation is said to be converse, or direct, if (1) an increase in one of the two dimensions is accompanied by an increase in the other and (2) a decrease in one dimension causes a decrease in the other. The correlation is inverse if an increase in one of the two dimensions are accompanied by a decrease in the other, and vice versa . The cohesion and coherence of the original text and equivalent translations were also investigated. As mentioned earlier, "context of situation" and "register" are important factors in producing a cohesive text (Martin, 2007). Therefore, providing such a text requires the translator to have some social, cultural and communicative knowledge in both source and target language.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Applying the semiotic approach to literary translation, as an example, a part of a poem entitled "rošanī, man, gol, ąb " was selected; accompanied by its French and English translations, was schematized according to the tensive model. In fact, the affective and cognitive load of the original text were compared with the ones of the related translations.

- The Original Persian Text:

چیزهایی هست، که نمی دانم/ می دانم سبزه ای را بکنم خواهم مرد.

- The Suggested English Translation:

There are things that I don't know/ I know if I pick up a grass I will die.

This part, having phrases like I don't know/ I know, is placed on the axe of extensity (cognitive); as regards to the axe of passion-emotion, the phrase I will die, is high in intensity and considering the type of conditional sentence, high in certainty. Therefore, the tensive model of this part of the original could be designed like this:

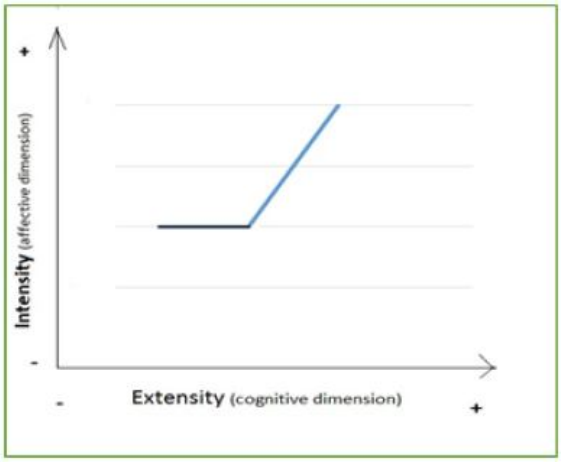


Figure 1: Tensive Model of the Original Text

There are things, I don't know, this sentence is written in a way that not knowing some rules or information does not matter to the author of the original, so we have straight line with no changes in affective value; then with knowing a little rule (picking a grass), the poet is sure that he will die; so we have a little change in cognitive but an intense one in affective dimension. Now we will have a look at the two versions, English and French respectively:

There are things that I don't know. I know if I pick up a plant I will die. In this example, the English translation respects the form and the content of the original except, the original term grass is interpreted as plant: "grass" refers to the smallest green living thing, which shows the respect of the poet for the life and nature, no matter how a living creature is tiny.

Il y a tant de choses dont j'ignore le secret !

Je sais que je mourrai si j'arrache un jour un brin d'herbe. Regarding the formal aspect of the translation, French version is longer than the original; the punctuation is changed: "," and so the pause of the sentence is omitted; the "!" at the end, changes the falling intonation to a rising intonation; consequently the rhythm and the tempo of the text is also modified.

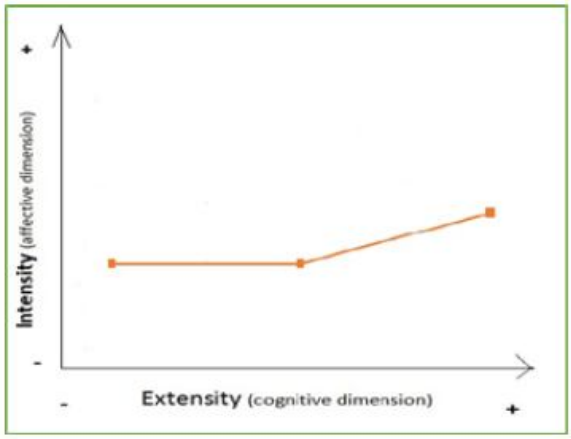


Figure2: Tensive Model of the English Translation

Regarding the lexis, the term tant de choses signifying a lot of things, does not match with the original and changes the cognitive dimension of it. Plus, the term secret is not mentioned in the original but being interested by the French translator, changes the simple phenomenological sentence to something mysterious and leads to the modification of the affective value of the original.

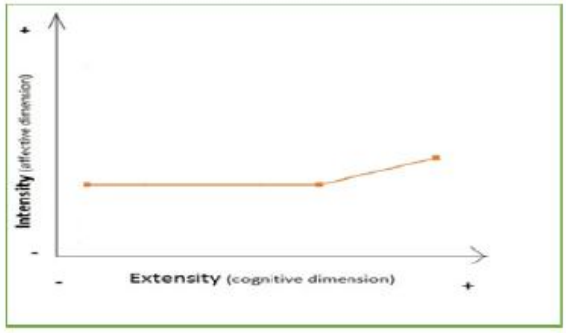


Figure3: Tensive Model of French Translation

The comparison of the three schemas together, could be like below:

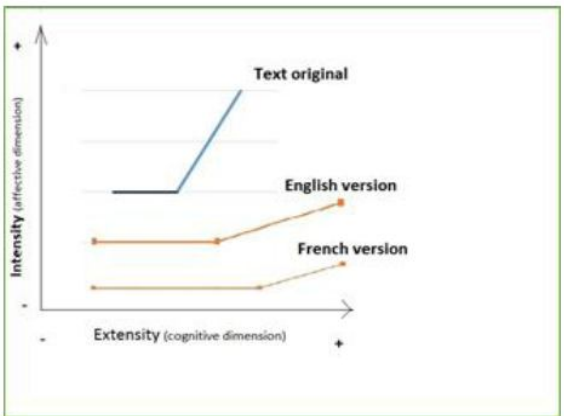


Figure 4: The Integrated Tensive Model of the Original and Its Translations

The following tables summarizes the analysis of some other phrases of the mentioned poem along with their English and French translations; socio-cultural considerations are also mentioned:

Eng.	Fr.	Persian and analysis	Analysis 1
There is no cloud.	Pas de nuages.	In original text, the phrase is ended by a verb "نیست"(nist), in French translation, however, the verb is omitted, which conduct to a faster rhythm and changes the tempo of the original.	Eng version stayed close to the original: syntaxically and lexically.

Table1: Analysis of Phrase1

Eng.	Fr.	Persian and analysis	Analysis1
There is no wind.	Pas de vent.	In original text, the phrase is ended by a verb "نیست"(nist),", in French translation, however, the verb is omitted, which conduct to a faster rhythm and changes the tempo of the original.	Eng version stayed close to the original: syntaxically and lexically.

Table2: Analysis of Phrase2

Eng.	Fr.	Persian and analysis	Analysis1	Analysis2
Perch (inf.) a high place or position, especially one where you can sit and watch	m'assieds	The Persian word "می نشینم"(mi-nēšinam) is in accordance with "to sit down"	Considering that the basin's edge is not high (common basins found in old Iranian houses), the French translation is closer to the original. Plus, the register of the word is changed in Eng version.	In the first part of the poem, the poet is intended to simply describe the scene around him, we are looking through his eyes, the point of view changes as the poet changes his own.

Table 3: Analysis of Phrase3

Eng.	Fr.	Persian and analysis	Analysis1	Analysis2
The fish swimming about, light, I, flower, and water.	Jeu frétillant des poisons, lumière, fleurs, eau, reflet de moi-même.	The original text is presenting the common picture of old Iranian houses, where there was a blue basin with some gold fish inside that. The punctuation mark (:) is used to give more details about the scene. In Eng version, lack of right punctuation, the reader lose probably the logic of the text, the cohesion is disturbed.	None of the two translation, mentioned the kind of the fish the poet had in mind. Imagining of the intended scene has become hard for a reader situated in another socio-cultural context.	In French version, the translator changed the order of the words; plus, the meaning of I is explained (reflet de moi-même: the reflection of myself in the water). So the point of view, the order of the things the poet laid his eye on, was changed. Flower (گل) is also changed to a plural noun, which also destroys the original scene.

Table4: Analysis of Phrase4

Eng.	Fr.	Persian and analysis
The purity of the grapes of life.	Eclat virginal de la grappe de vie.	In the original text the poet uses the word "cluster" ():He tries to say every pure things in life are all gathered together; As we see none of the version could transfer this meaning and emotion.

Table5: Analysis of Phrase5

Eng.	Fr.	Persian and analysis
Mother is picking basils. Bread, basils and cheese, a cloudless sky Some wet petunias.	Ma mère cueille du basilic. Pain, basilic et fromage, Ciel sans taches, pétunias laves à la pluie.	Here, again the French version tends to explain the implicit intention of the poet. "wet petunias"; When there's no cloud in the sky, there's no rain. In Iran, traditionally people who has houses with gardens and basin, water the flowers in the morning or afternoon and sit there and have something to eat, usually cucumber, basils and cheese and bread.

Table6: Analysis of Phrase6

CONCLUSION

Socio-cultural factors form a crucial part of the literary discourse; they carry, to a great extent, the aesthetic-affective load of a literary discourse. Translator, on one hand, as a linguistic mediator has to decode all language signs from the source to the target language and on the other hand, is considered as a socio-cultural mediator; His role as an intercultural and intersocial medium imply a deep knowledge of the both, source and target cultures and social contexts. As the results indicated, not being aware of the importance of socio-cultural elements and their impact on the reception of the literary discourse by the reader, the translators have changed the affective load of the original. In fact, all modifications, even very simple, in terms of punctuation, language register as well as other formal features encountered a change in the rhythm and the tempo of the original. Consequently as presented, through a semiotic approach, on tensive model, the English and French versions, not fully respecting the socio-cultural ambiance of the original, fall far from having the same aesthetic-affective value of the original. Applying semiotic approach to literary translation and using tensive model could greatly assist both in translation assessment and translator training. Through raising the translator's awareness of the important role that socio-cultural features play in transferring the value of the poetic discourse, this approach demands a right perception of the socio-cultural context in both, source and target languages.

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