

THE EFFECT OF TRANSLATION STUDIES ON COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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Abstract

In a globalizing world, there are many boundaries among many nations. There are dominant cultures and their languages over the minor languages and nations. Comparative literature tries to break the walls among nations. It takes consideration every works of literature whether it is major or minor. While comparing a work of literature of a nation, we also take into consideration its culture and history. Since a word has different connotations for different cultures, translation studies become important for comparative literature. In fact, there are many theories and studies that have effects on comparative literature. In this article, the relationship between comparative literature and translation studies will be examined.

Key Words: Comparative Literature, Translation Studies

1. INTRODUCTION

Comparative literature is a very broad subject and there are many definitions of what comparative literature is, but the simplest and clearest one is “Comparative Literature is the study of “literature without walls” It is interested in all nations regardless of their languages, times, genres and boundaries. Unlike Weltliteratur which is a term first used by Goethe, it gives equal attention to all kind of literature. For comparative literature, the power of nations or languages are not important, however it aims to analyze the relationships among different

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literatures whether they are minor or major works and tries to find similarities and differences.

1.2. Comparative Literature

Rene Wellek, one of the European scholars, argued that comparative literature is against nationalism by saying that “Comparative Literature arose as a reaction against the narrow nationalism of much nineteenth century scholarship, as a protest against isolationism of many historians of French, German, Italian, English etc. literature.” (Wellek 165) While World literature is interested in major languages such as French, German, English, Comparative literature deals with major and minor literatures together. Dominant languages are known and spoken by many people all over the world, but what about the other less spoken languages? How can we study the works of less-spoken languages? How do we understand their literatures if we don't speak those languages? In this point, the importance of translation studies in Comparative literature comes up. When less spoken languages are translated, many people can understand easily. Dominant languages are already spoken, the important thing is to understand and study minor languages by translating them into major languages. Likewise, people who speak minor languages can understand the literatures of dominant languages thanks to translation. Through translation, we can understand their works of literatures, languages, cultures or even histories. If translation wouldn't be a study in comparative literature, those less-spoken languages would be forgotten and they wouldn't survive. By translating and studying them, we treat equally all languages in comparative literature. We don't discriminate languages through translation.

2. TRANSLATION STUDIES

When translation studies come up in 19th century, it was seen as threat to literatures. It is because translation was treated that it was a kind of misinterpretation. Its accuracy was questioned whether it gives the same

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message with the original text or not. In the beginning of translation studies, many conservatives rejected translation of many texts especially religious texts such as Bible. They thought that when it was translated, the words would lose their meanings, they were the words of God so it wouldn't be translated. When a text was translated, it is thought that it lost its originality; it wouldn't make any sense in its translation. However, when comparative literature developed and went beyond the European literature, the need of translation came up.

2.1. Emily Apter

Emily Apter who is a professor of French and Comparative Literature in New York University, tries to break the identification of language with nation. "In naming a translational process constitutive of its disciplinary nomination comparative literature breaks the isomorphic fit between the name of a nation and the name of a language" (Apter 410) She proposes a "new comparative literature" based on translation which she sees variously initiated in the work of Leo Spitzer, Jacques Derrida, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. According to Emily Apter, humanity is related to the translation because there is a lasting relationship between human, nation and language. Apter cites Leo Spitzer's famous statement that "Any language is human prior to being national: Turkish, French and German languages first belong to humanity and then to Turkish, French and German peoples" (Spitzer 41) Apter sees translation as a way of denationalization of literature. She agrees that language first belongs to humanity then nation. She sees language as a universal tool for the understanding of humanity. Translation studies unite many nations; it is because when a text is translated, people can find similarities between their languages and the translated text. In fact, translation shows that how language is universal rather than being regional or national. For example, if translation studies wouldn't be, how do people who don't speak English, understand the works of Shakespeare? How do they compare their literature with the other? In this point, translation comes into play.

If we say that original text is the self, translation unites the self and the other. Through translation, "othering" disappears. Walter Benjamin who is German literary critic and translator, states the importance of translation by comparing translation and the original text with the idea of life and after life. The original

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text has its own life before its translation but when it is translated, it has after life too. Thanks to translation, original text never dies. We can say that translation is a kind of recreation and there is “a vital connection” between the original text and translation (Benjamin 71) Benjamin shows this “vital connection” by stating that “it is translation which catches fire on the eternal life of the works and the perpetual renewal of language” (74) He supports the necessity of translation in comparative literature. He believes that translation makes literary works alive. As long as they are translated, they will be survived. He also says that translation is not for the reader, it is like a work of art by stating “No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, and no symphony for the listener” (Benjamin 69) you shouldn’t take the reader or the receiver into consideration. While translating a text, you don’t have to think about the values, beliefs or histories of the target languages.

2.2. Gayatri Spivak

Unlike Benjamin, In “The Politics of Translation” Gayatri Spivak who is an Indian theorist and philosopher says that “if you want to make the translated text accessible, try doing it for the person who wrote it.” (Spivak 407) For Spivak, when you consider the receiver, your translation becomes valid. Otherwise, it can’t go further except for its own country or nation. In fact, she doesn’t support the idea of translation much. According to her, first of all, one should learn the other languages in order to be able to make a comparison. If you want to identify yourself with the other, you should know their languages. She says “If you are interested in talking about the other, and/or in making claim to be the other, it is crucial to learn other languages.” (Spivak 407) According to her, learning the target language that you will compare is the key for comparative literature. If you read just the translation of a work of literature, you won’t understand how the “other” is. First, by learning the language you can read the text closely and understand it better. Otherwise, you will read just what the translators see from their own point of view. In this point, she blames Comparative Literature for relying on translations instead of reading closely in the original. She points out the importance of close reading in translation by stating that “Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text.” (Spivak 400) In the “Death of a Discipline”, Spivak states that

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Comparative Literature is near the end. It is because translation studies move ahead of Comparative Literature. Everything is being translated nowadays, if it goes on like that, there won't be any original text to make comparison.

2.3. Itamar Even Zohar

Itamar Even Zohar, an Israeli scholar of cultural studies from Tel Aviv University, developed a poly system. In "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem" (1978) he explains the position of translated literature. According to him, literature is a kind of system and every nation has its own poly system which includes high and low literatures, different styles and genres, canonized or un-canonized works, different studies. They influence each other. According to Zohar, if we divide this poly system into two parts as primary and secondary; high, canonized and popular works of literature are seen as primary while low, un-canonized works are seen as secondary or peripheral. So, what is the position of translated literature in this poly system? In fact, translated literature has both a secondary and primary position in this poly system. Translation has a primary position "(a) when a poly system has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is "young" in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either "peripheral" (within a large group of correlated literatures) or "weak" or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crisis, or literary vacuums in a literature." (Zohar 243) In these three situations, translation has a primary position, it is because since a young literature is in developmental process, and it is ready to change. So, translation shapes these kinds of literatures to make them serviceable or it strengthens the weak literatures by expanding it beyond its borders. It has a central role in these types of literary works. On the other hand, it has a secondary position too. It is peripheral in established literatures. It is because these kind of high literatures have their own rules or values that don't change. In this point, translation has no significance because it doesn't touch the center and it can't much effect on these types of literatures. It just plays with the words not the center. I agree with Zohar's idea of changing position of the translation in the poly system. For example, less spoken languages and their "young" literatures need translation to become popular. When they are translated, they are read by others. Through translation, they are recognized by other popular literatures and they are shaped.

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However, languages that have high or popular literatures don't need translation as much as "young" literatures. Because they have their own position, they are already established and known by a lot of people so translation isn't as significant as in young or weak literatures. For instance, English has a long established literature so translation can't shape it anymore since it has its own popularity all around the world. To sum up, in his poly system theory, translation and translated literature have changing positions. Translation studies are essential in comparative literature, it is because through translations, literatures influence each other, and people understand others better. For example, when an English text is translated in Turkish, they can find similarities or differences between two literatures. Translation unites two or more literatures in comparative literature.

2.4. Lawrence Venuti

Lawrence Venuti who is a translation theorist describes the role of translator in comparative literature in his book "The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation" (1995). He emphasizes two terms "domestication" and "foreignization" he discusses these two translation strategies in his book. Domestication is to reduce the foreignness or the strangeness of the foreign text to be adopted in target language. When a foreign text is domesticated, the reader of target language easily adopts and understands it as if it is a part of their literatures. They are not defamiliarized from the text. According to Venuti, domestication is "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back home." (Venuti 20) On the other hand, foreignization is to show the reader of the target language how the foreign text is different from theirs. They are alienated when they read it, because it has different linguistic or lexical characteristics, reader don't easily understand this type of translations. They can't find similarities between the foreign text and their texts or literatures. Venuti describes foreignization as "an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad." (Venuti 20) For Venuti, domestication makes the translator invisible. It is because since the text is domesticated, its readers don't realize whether it is a translation or not, they forget the role of translator. Since the translator gives the message of the original text without reflecting the differences of the original text or the cultural

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elements of it instead he or she tries to translate it in order to be adopted in the target culture. S/he doesn't show how the original text from the target language. However, in foreignization, translator is visible. It is because translator uses the cultural elements of the foreign text, they don't mind the adoption of the foreign text. When the reader is defamiliarized from the text, they can see the differences between their literatures and the other literatures. They can easily compare or contrast. In foreignization, the original text should not be dissociated from its culture, in the target language in which it is translated; it should still have its own linguistic or cultural characteristics. Otherwise, languages that are not foreignized in translation will be assimilated. They will resemble each other so they won't be any linguistic variety in comparative literature.

Lawrence Venuti supports the idea of foreignization. He also advocates the visibility of the translator through translation. He says that foreignization "entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language." (Venuti 242) Venuti sees translation as a mediator between the original text and its translation. For example, when a minor language is translated in English by using the foreignization method, English readers will see the cultural or linguistic features of the original text, so this minor language can broad its fame or it can preserve its cultural elements, values or beliefs. It doesn't have to be assimilated while being translated. He believes that translator creates a community by showing the values and characteristics of the foreign text. He states that "The interests that bind the community through a translation are not simply focused on the foreign text, but reflected in the domestic values, beliefs and representations that the translator inscribe in it." (Venuti 477)

"Translation never communicates in an untroubled fashion because the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text by reducing them and supplying another set of differences basically domestic, drawn from the receiving culture and language to enable the foreign to be received there." (Venuti 468) He never sees translation something which makes people confused rather he sees translation as a way of understanding people from the different parts of the world. Foreignization doesn't mean to translate a text word for word rather it means giving the message of the original text by

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using its cultural and linguistic elements. Walter Benjamin says that “it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully.” (Benjamin 79) According to Benjamin, translation shouldn’t be same with original text or exact copy of it but it should carry its message to the reader of the target language.

3. CONCLUSION

Translation study is essential for comparative literature. As it is mentioned before, if translation studies wouldn’t be, dominant languages such as English, French or Spanish would dominate other minor languages and there wouldn’t be language diversity in literature. By translating the works of Shakespeare, translator doesn’t assimilate the language but s/he broadens its fame. Through translation, people who speak minor languages understand other literatures. They can compare and contrast the other literatures and theirs. By seeing the differences or similarities, they widen their perspectives. They can produce different kinds of works since they are interacting with other literatures. Although some philosophers or critics see translation as an ending of comparative literature, for example, Susan Bassnett’s prediction is that “it is one sense dead.” (Bassnett 47) Translation studies contribute the future of comparative literature. Through translation people compare and contrast, so it is not ending of comparative literature. For example, Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk is very famous in Turkey thanks to translations of his works in many languages; he became very famous in other countries too. If translation wouldn’t be a study in comparative literature, comparative literature would consist of just dominant languages. But translation allows minor languages as well as major languages play a role in comparative literature. Thanks to translation, languages which are less spoken have more readers nowadays. Likewise, well known works of literatures earn more reputation all over the world through translation. Shakespeare’s 66sonnet can be given as an example in this point. For example, 66sonnet is one of the most famous sonnets of Shakespeare but when it is translated in Turkish by Can Yücel, it became more popular in Turkey. Turkish readers can understand it through its translation. While it is popular all over the world, translation also contributes its fame.

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In this globalizing world, translation and comparative literature together break the walls among many nations. Since comparative literature is interested in both minor and major cultures, translation is a tool of uniting these cultures and nations. Translation helps people to deepen and broaden their perspectives towards other literatures. In comparative literature, without translation, people wouldn't understand each other and so they wouldn't see the differences and similarities among them. Finally, Translation studies are essential for comparative literature, they complete each other.

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Short Biography

I was born in 22 November 1990 in Istanbul. I went to Ibrahim Turhan High School in 2004 and later I became entitled to have education in Beykent University English Language and Literature department in 2008. I graduated from university in 2012 as an honor student with GPA: 3.79/4.00. In September 2012, I started to work in Istanbul Aydın University as an English lecturer and in 2013 began to have my master education.