

FROM PROJECT TO ACHIEVEMENT – IN THE TRANSLATOR’S CREATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract. *The article aims at some essential aspects of the ethics of (both literary and specialized) translation, starting from the premise that the translator has to observe a set of principles of professional deontology, because in most cases his/her work is paid. A translator may refer to, call into play, or rely on, certain cultural biases or even special translation strategies, yet we believe it is linguistic appropriateness and correctness, as well as communicative and cultural adequacy that should remain at the centre of his/her professional concerns. The author concluded faithful translation (in its very simple acceptance) to be what professional translators must primarily seek: they should translate accurately, in a flexible and readable manner, primarily aiming at domesticating the original – without however ignoring or excluding the necessary aspects of foreignization.*

Key words: *professional translation, ethical codes, translation strategy, domestication vs. foreignization, faithfulness, accuracy*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the present paper, we intend to discuss and briefly analyze (even if somewhat cursorily or expeditiously) – from the standpoint of the concrete achievement or performance (compared to the translator’s intent, whether proclaimed or not) – some aspects of the difficulties, achievements and failures or shortcomings in the field of the more recent techniques and strategies of translation. We are going to refer, first of all, to the *domestication vs. foreignization* binomial. We start from the premise that the primary (and desirable) functionality of translation (be it literary or specialist translation) must be appropriated (to the point of perfection, if possible) to the quadrilateral formed by *ethic* (or *conscience*) – *will* – *science* – *skills*.

2. FROM PROJECT TO ACHIEVEMENT

Therefore, we thought it suitable to begin by citing some *definitions* and *demarcation* attempts. General dictionaries (and also internet databases like *Wikipedia*, etc.) define ethical codes as being written systems of standards for ethical conduct. In professional activities, such codes are required in order to define the limits of propriety with respect to professional behaviour. As a rule, ethical codes are adopted by the management of the organizations in question because they are perceived as a pragmatic necessity in a complex society that is expected to value moral concepts highly; it goes without saying that they are not loosely intended to foster or illustrate particular moral theories. Therefore, they essentially differ from moral codes applicable in the religious, cultural or educational domains.

Such codes (whether codes of conduct, codes of business ethics or codes of professional practice) are adopted by

organizations to help members to understanding the difference between what should be considered *right* and *wrong*. That understanding is expected to form the basis of their future professional decisions. Of course there are matters that are still debated in terms of how to precisely define the above regulatory instruments and corpora, e.g. the differing degree of comprehension separating *ethical codes* and *codes of conduct* (the former sets out the values that support the code and describe an organization’s obligation to its stakeholders, whereas the latter usually sets out restrictions on behaviour, and is typically addressed to, and intended for, employees alone); and even the distinction frequently made between *ethics* (which is collective) and *morality* (which is individual).

Seen as an attempt to codify *good* and *bad* behaviour, an ethical code ideally establishes various principles, values, standards, or rules of behaviour meant to guide the decisions, procedures and systems of a given organization. In some cases, firm rules are established, but more often than not ethical codes provide general guidance, or even aspirational advice. Most (professional) code of ethics emphasize such (generally human) values as loyalty or faithfulness, fairness, the right of free expression, minimizing harm, independent action, avoiding conflicts of interest, etc.

In the field of professional translation, most codes of ethics try to define and delineate the main roles, standards and responsibilities that practitioners have to assume, observe and comply with. Since, in most cases, the standards set tend to be near superlative, such prescriptive rules are provided as “Every translation shall be faithful and render exactly the idea and form of the original – this fidelity constitutes both a moral and legal obligation for the translator” – International Federation of Translators (FIT), cf. *The Translator’s Charter* (approved by the Congress at Dubrovnik in 1963, and amended in Oslo on July 9, 1994). In their professional practice, “Translators should endeavor to provide service of the highest quality in their professional practice” (*ibidem*).

Accordingly, the most highly praised qualities of a good translator seem to be *accuracy*, *accountability*, *impartiality*, *confidentiality* and *limitation of practice*. As for the objectively verifiable content of the said requirements, here are some more quotations – from the same source: “The translator must translate accurately. By accurate translation we understand a translation that preserves the meaning, style and register of the source document”; “The translator must know his/her linguistic limitations and decline assignments that go beyond his/her skills and competence. The translator must only accept assignments that he/she can complete and deliver in a timely manner (by the due date). The translator must accept documents that he/she can translate. No work should be subcontracted to colleagues without prior written permission. The translator should possess sound knowledge of the source language and be an expert in the target language. The translator should accept translations only for

fields or subject matters where he/she has knowledge and experience”; “The translator is accountable for his/her work and must recognize and acknowledge translation mistakes and try to rectify them even when the translation has been completed, in order to avoid potential liability and risk issues”; “The translator must respect, under all circumstances, confidentiality and privacy of the information contained in all documentation provided by the client for the purpose of translation, unless otherwise required by law”.

Additionally, a good translator should maintain and constantly improve his/her professional skills: “The Translator: Must seek professional development courses to maintain, improve and expand translation skills and general knowledge through self-teaching, formal and informal continuing education. Must acquire the proper terminology and enhance his/her knowledge by creating and updating terminology files. Must seek evaluative feedback and practice self-evaluation concerning performance”.

With respect to the other actors in the said professional domain (and market segment, for that matter), supplementary rules, standards and constraints are added, e.g. “Respect for all parties: The translator must show respect for all parties involved in the translation assignment, including respect for self, the agency and to its clients. The translator must respect copy rights and intellectual property. Translated documents remain the client’s exclusive property”. Of course any translators’ code of ethics is formulated in keeping with *national* and *international* legal regulations.

Quite naturally, the evolution of society and the ever-changing contexts that translators face bring forth challenges and difficulties in ethical decision-making, which such ethical codes can help professionals in the field to identify and cope with. Their responses to such new and challenging issues have to prove efficient, justifiable and relevant. The more or less recent translation strategies that theorists and practitioners alike embraced and let themselves be guided by should not turn into mere theoretical, useless patterns or downright barriers.

Here are some practical aspects, namely illustrative cases of achievement and failure. Without intending to proclaim ourselves arbiters or gurus of this complex, even hazardous province, and much less authoritarian guardians or strict supervisors of the adequacy (or appropriateness, correctness) in the field – since translation is definitely an intricate, difficult and rich domain –, we undertook a modest examination of a variety of texts (both literary and excerpted from the media, including, to a limited extent, even the *websphere*), in terms of how much the specific qualities that make a good translation are observed. So we mainly focused on the *accuracy*, *transparency* and *fluency* of the translated fragments (making up *functional faithfulness*), typically analyzing the semantics, stylistics and cultural attitude evinced by the Romanian versions, while having in mind the specificity of the *domestication* / *foreignization* choice. Some of our findings are presented below, under these possible headings: ● Semantic inadequacy: – Cases of mistranslating *False Friends*: – Ambiguity – Sheer howlers. ● Omission, or adding unnecessary information. ● Inadequate or false cultural information. ● Stylistic inadequacy. ● Inadequate use of the Romanian language.

A good example of patent difficulties and notorious challenges in finding suitable translatorial equivalences can

certainly be the issue of marking grammatical gender. For instance, English has only one way of saying *a self-made man*, so there is no possibility of saying *a self-made woman*... though there are certainly lots of women who would define themselves like that. (So, *what* should they be called instead?). Similar difficulties are posed by translating literary texts in which there occurs the so-called *Intimate Pattern* (which M. Mathiot defined like this: “the striking characteristic of the use of *he*, *she*, *it* in the intimate pattern is the speaker’s disregard for the two attributes that serve as defining criteria for entities in the normative pattern: 1. human status, and 2. biological sex. The intimate pattern is constituted by three types of usage, in which the rules of the normative pattern are disregarded: on the one hand, non-human entities are personified, while human entities are denied their human status. On the other hand, there is a reversal of sex roles: women are treated as if they were men and referred to as *he*; men are treated as if they were women and referred to as *she*”. Of course there are numerous other linguistic issues that are equally difficult for a well-meaning professional translator or interpreter, e.g. grammatical agreement or concord, the sequence of verb tenses, the specific means of intensification (that are typical of either English or Romanian), expressing impersonal meaning, expressing modality, etc.

In our analytical approach we will start from some illustrative remarks on the distortion of the linguistic message as a result of the uncontrolled, chaotic and, ultimately, uneducated influx of very recent loan words (or Anglicisms), e.g. “Revenind la 2013, după ce pierdusem în primul tur la trei turnee diferite, domnul Țiriac mi-a dat *un wild-card* pentru Madrid. (...) Mi-am angajat *un mental coach* pentru câteva luni, înainte de *French Open*. (...) Nu e ușor să ajungi numărul 1 în lume. Trebuie să fii foarte *consistentă*, trebuie să joci un tenis bun tot anul” (*the infelicitous, very imperfect translation of an interview of Simona Halep, published on the net*). As we could see, the term *wild-card*, although a specialized term, sounds out of place here, while *un mental coach* is jarring in the context, and *consistentă* – instead of *consecventă* – is a clear mistranslation, arising from a *False Friend*).

The following example is excerpted from the variegated, motley globalized (or rather cosmopolitan) lingo of the press: “(pictura numită) *Salvatorul lumii*” [vândută la o licitație în decembrie 2017 cu aproximativ o jumătate de miliard]... Normally – and traditionally, the term would have been translated as “Mântuitorul” (cf. Eng. *the Saviour*, as it seems the painting in the original / source text was called – which was poorly, i.e. literally translated). And the public space seems to vie with the media in this specific respect, e.g. “Să depășim aceste *diviziuni*” (from the translation of a speech by Princess Margareta, Nov. 2017) – instead of *dezbinări, neînțelegeri, situații conflictuale*); “Însă susținea că nu câștigă suficient de mult și că nepoții săi îl obligă la *costuri*” – instead of *cheltuieli*; “inginerii civili” – instead of *inginerii constructori*, etc.

Though it might be seen as a secondary concern (given the fact that the question of linguistic standardization and accuracy is nowadays treated rather loosely and (pseudo)democratically, i.e. *politically correct*), some totally un-Romanian translations that the mass media generally exhibit can be cited in this context, as well, e.g. “1942. Nemții

prăbușesc [instead of *doboară!*] un avion englez *peste Paris*” (from a *Telekom* tele-text film presentation). Moreover, it may be noted that, in some cases, the very correctness (and also standardization / normalization) of the Romanian language sometimes seems to be overtly questioned, e.g. “*Primele două cele mai mari mall-uri*” (in *Magazin istoric*, November 2017, p. 91); *Malaysia* (*ibidem*).

The first and most obvious cause of such infelicitous translations or renditions clearly and evidently lies in the *literal* character of the material results of those translators’ work, e.g. “*zise cu amar*” (which is actually the erroneous, blatantly imperfect, since literal, Romanian rendition of Eng. *bitterly* – cf. also *bitter*, *bitterness* –, where a normal, semantically and syntactically accurate translation should have read *cu încrâncenare*, *încrâncenat*, etc.); “*Cândva obișnuiam să cunosc indivizi ca dumneata*” (cf. Eng. “*I used to know...*”); “*Ai încărcat corpul lui Mitchell și valizele în elicopter, ai zburat peste ocean și ai coborât cu elicopterul jos deasupra apei*” (the translation is at least ambiguous: the reader is led to understand that the character flew to the other side of the ocean!); “*Aparent, părinții doamnei Almore au angajat un detectiv particular*” (cf. Eng. *apparently* – where a much better, clearly unambiguous, Romanian variant would have been *se pare că*); “*să se țină la depărtare de vecini*”; “*Nu vrem nici un polițist împușcat, pe cât posibil*” (where the translator’s way of expression seems to have been the result of sheer lack of reflection and/or pure indolence – compare with “*Nu ne-ar plăcea să fie împușcat niciun polițist, dacă se poate*”, etc.); “*Asta pare a ieși din discuție...*”; “*După trei minute astfel petrecute, am virat spre continent*” (where one may wonder if the translator tried to render Eng. *inland* or *towards the mainland*), etc.

Very often indeed, what one is faced with is the translator’s manifest lack of knowledge of the vocabulary of the source-language (and also – one has to add – his/her failure to make proper use of a decent bilingual or monolingual dictionary, that is to say, the most useful – and, normally, indispensable – bibliographic instrument that a good, conscientious translator should employ), e.g. “*alarma* (ceasului)” (instead of *soneria*...); “*și și-a turnat o porție decentă*” (cf. Eng. *decent*); “*Omul cu nas ascuțit s-a materializat în stânga mea*” (cf. Eng. *to materialize*); “*s-a întors cu două pahare înalte*” (cf. *highballs* in the original text – a recognized, and normally recognizable, lexical (and WFR) *False Friend*: “**highball** [ˈhɑːboːl / ˈhɑːboːl] *noun* [countable] especially American English: an alcoholic drink, especially whisky or brandy mixed with water or soda” (<https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary>); “*un Colt .38*” (which, admittedly, represents a rather special case, involving a spelling / typographical convention of English). Furthermore, sometimes very common *False Friends* (which ought to have been well-known) can be encountered in erroneous, sadly superficial translations, so one comes to wonder why the authors of the texts in question showed such a shallow attitude to their own professional proficiency, documentation and self-training, e.g. “*un vultur de la presă*” (cf. Eng. *vulture*); “*Ochi violeți. Aproape purpurii. Ochi ca de fată*” (cf. Eng. *purple*).

In other cases, the errors of equivalence arise from disregarding the dialectic interplay the diachronic axis and the synchronic linguistic norm (or convention). Here are some of our examples: (the first one is a more general observation,

which applies to several translators and translations of literary texts that we surveyed – Rom. *pix* is an always risky equivalence for rendering English *pen*: native speakers of English are not in the least interested in marking the existence of a particular writing instrument, like a *ballpointpen* or *ballpen*, since everyday use finds it satisfactory to mention the term *pen*: by the way, should our current bilingual dictionaries make a detailed glossing of *pen*, providing a whole range of words, including, say, *stilou*, *pix*, *toc*, *condei*, *plăvăz*? And, again, should the equivalent rendition of such a text observe the strictly contextual limitations, i.e. the exact concordance with the period of time when the plot of the book took place?: “*Pe teighea (...) erau obișnuitul pix fără arc, sugativă ostenită și sticla de cerneală murdară*” (note that Raymond Chandler’s novel was published as early as 1944, so at a time when people would use mere *pens*, or rather *penholders*, but never *ballpens*); “*a-și desface baierile pungii*” (*Magazin istoric*, November 2017 – where a specific type of anachronism occurs, i.e. a both cultural-stylistic and referential kind of anachronism, since there is no adequacy of the referent to the time period referred to in the text: after all, the text makes reference to *malls*; if the translator had been willing to stylistically comply with the stylistic rigours of the text, he/she would have said (by adapting – or equating – it) “*a-și deschide (larg) portmoneul*”; “*bijuterii expuse sub spoturi*” (basically, we can make the same observation as above, regarding this time the interplay of diachrony and synchrony, as against terminology and semasiology: the historical period when the neologistic term *spot* started to be used in Romania is at loggerheads with the time setting of the story in the novel, which takes place in the mid-1950s; so what we actually have to do with is a case of faulty lexical updating or synchronization, since a rather recent term, in use after 1990, was used to translate the reality of the 1950s in America); similarly, a few pages below the translator produces such renditions as: “*un dealer de automobile*”, “*sunetele surfului*” (intended to render Romanian “(val de tip) brizant”). Now here is a similar, though much more interesting case – which we believe deserves further, more methodical, discussion: “*Comisionarul era înalt (...) și la fel de cool ca o bucată de pui în aspic*”.

There unfortunately occur quite numerous genuine translation howlers, too, e.g. “*Au adus un tanc!*” (in the subtitles to the movie *Les Misérables* starring Anthony Perkins, broadcast by *Prima TV*: the soundtrack was completely unambiguous as to the weapon the military were moving in, which was *a cannon*; as a matter of fact, the barrel of the gun was clearly visible on screen; and, to top it all, the episode presented took place in 1830); “*pubelă de gunoi*” (a case of redundancy, i.e. a pleonastic phrase); “*un coafez poponar*” (the possibility that the translator could have used the underlined term ironically or humorously is, indeed, rather slight), etc.

We think that the remarks of a predominantly cultural nature that we selected may illustrate a type of subtler (though equally serious) equivalence and/or rendition challenges and errors, e.g. the very original title of Chandler’s novel (*The Lady in the Lake*), referring back to Tennyson’s famous romantic poem *The Lady of the Lake*), poses the problem of explicitation: what should the translator have done in this case? Maybe provide the reader with a preliminary footnote?: “*–Nu te-aș fi sunat, dacă nu era. [in the line below]* Un

absolvent de Harvard. Știa să folosească frumos modul *conjunctiv*". Actually, there is neither *conjunctive* nor *subjunctive* in the Romanian version; anyway, the original text literally contained a mention of the *subjunctive* – and consequently, the Romanian reader should have been presented with a fairly close equivalence of that grammatical mood (in the respective logical and semantic context), i.e. the so-called *conditional-optative mood* (Rom. *modul condițional-optativ*).

Last but not least, one can notice the totally inadequate – and all too frequent – use of (standard, grammatical, correct) Romanian, e.g. “indiferent ce gen de șantaj plănuia să folosească (...), financiar sau *amatoricesc*”; “Cinci mii de dolari (...) Polițaii nu ți-ar da nici *plevușcă*” (maybe the translator made a regrettable confusion between the term *plevușcă*, which actually means “small fry” – i.e. “unimportant people”, and *mărunțiș*, meaning “little money”, perhaps considering the former as a more stylistically colourful, i.e. slangy, variant of the latter); “un ins *dibace*”(!); “O casă frumoasă cu toate *luxurile*”(!); “Nu am avut dificultăți *în a găsi*...”; “Am oprit *cu oceanul mormăind* invizibil aproape sub picioarele mele”, etc. And, finally, here are some examples of what we believe are extreme cases of linguistic ignorance or/and abusive neglect: “Dacă pînă ieri-dimineață nici măcar nu știai de existență lui Almore, *trebuie că* de atunci ai auzit o grămadă de chestii despre el” (where a far better variant would have been “cu siguranță că...”); “*Trebuie că* o cunoscuse binișor pe doamna Florian” (instead of the correct, much simpler Romanian phrases: “Se vede (treaba) că...”, or “Era limpede / clar că...”); “*Trebuie că* a simțit miros de marijuana...”, etc. (The underlying English structures, which caused the calqued patterns cited above, are quite apparent – even transparent: “You *must have known* Mrs. Florian very well”, “He *must have smelled* marijuana...”).

3. CONCLUSION

We can conclude by saying that *faithful* translation (in its very minimalistic definition or acceptation) is what a professional translator must primarily seek. It is however evident that this is no simple desideratum, since the mere ethics of his/her profession should urge him/her to achieve a correct, well-adapted, nuanced, flexible, readable rendition, which should, first and foremost, be a *domesticated* variant of the original – which does not, nevertheless, exclude the necessary aspects of *foreignization* (meaning the illuminating elements of cultural insight and human empathy that a thoroughly educated, cultured individual, living in today's globalized village, must master).

Likewise, a good, ethical translator should not forget that, before trying to fly, a bird must make sure it/she/he has learnt how to walk and run (to paraphrase a German proverb).

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