

Introduction to Translation Studies

CHOOSE AN ORIGINAL TEXT AND ITS TRANSLATION.
DISCUSS THE STRATEGIES THE TRANSLATOR USED TO DEAL WITH
COLLOCATIONS, FIXED EXPRESSIONS, METAPHORS AND IDIOMS.

by

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1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives

Translating poetry satisfactorily is perhaps the most difficult task that any translator has Poetry ordinarily employs many more figurative expressions than does prose, and a poem as a whole may have one or more figurative levels of meaning Poetry also tends to employ novel expressions (Nida and Reyburn, 1981: 39).

Faced with such a task a translator may use a number of strategies to deal with the complex forms of lexical patterning in poetry such as fixed expressions, idioms, metaphors and collocations. In “Elegie XXI,” (Appendix 2) one from a series of twenty Roman Elegies written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and published in 1795 under the title “Elegien. Rom 1788” in J. C. F. Schiller’s literary journal, *Die Horen*, such forms are prevalent. The original German version of the “Römische Elegien,” (Appendix 1) including four editorially censored poems not published at the same time with the others, appears side by side with English translations by David Luke in *Goethe Erotic Poems* published in New York by Oxford University Press in 1988. Luke’s version is one of three English translations of the Roman Elegies which exist today. Lewis Robert Lind and Harry Hale have also released translations of this particular collection of poems by Goethe. An analysis of the general and specific strategies used by Luke for translating the above-mentioned forms of lexical patterning as well as an assessment of the overall effectiveness of the resulting translation follows in the discussion below.

1.2 Background

Ziolkowski (1980: 70) describes the Roman Elegies as a collection of:

. . . incidents and episodes from a Roman love affair arranged in a roughly chronological sequence . . . the first-person narrator is a German poet visiting in Italy-an older man who prefers the enjoyment of a secure love rather than the youthful challenge of obstacles. . . .

After living in Rome for two years Goethe returned to Weimar, Germany and did not want to give up his sense of spiritual liberation that he had experienced while in Italy. Only four weeks after his arrival he began to have a relationship with a simple young woman fifteen years his junior, Christiane Vulpius. It was this love affair and his Italian experience combined with a rekindled interest in the classics which gave him the inspiration to write the Roman Elegies. (Ziolkowski, 1980) But in contrast to Ziolkowski's claim that the poems should not be considered autobiographical verse, in the introduction to *Goethe Erotic Poems* Hans Rudolf Vaget points out that

[the] literary complexities in which that central experience is enveloped should not lead us to overlook the biographical core. First in Rome and now in Weimar, Goethe had found a new source of strength and inspiration that he was determined to keep alive. (Luke, 1988: xx)

1.3 Literary Significance and Verse Form of Source Text

In order to clearly understand the approach that Luke takes towards the translation of Elegy XXI it is crucial have basic knowledge about the significance of the poem at the point in time and place that it was published, and to be familiar with its original form. First published in the provincial town of Weimar, Germany the "Römische Elegien" were considered to be extremely liberal in their regard to morality by local readers. The poems received mixed responses from his audience, but the general reaction was one of outrage. (Ziolkowski, 1980) The significance of the poems, however, is not only based on their taboo nature, but primarily on their verse form. According to Ziolkowski, the Roman Elegies Goethe conquered the verse form of the elegiac distich for German literature. He states that

Goethe succeeded in creating a supple form in which it was possible to write a long poem and to express virtually everything – from the most delicate affairs of the heart to narrative of action and philosophical meditations Goethe naturalized an already existing form in German – a huge achievement that no other modern poet had yet managed." (Ziolkowski, 1980:74-75)

1.4 Methods for Target Text Translation

In view of the literary significance of the Roman Elegies, the basic criteria for their translation are a determining factor for the overall effectiveness of the Target Text (TT). The principle of equivalent effect requires that the TT should affect its recipients in the same way as the Source Text (ST) did its original audience, but Hervey, Higgins and Haywood point out that maximizing sameness while minimizing dissimilarities is an effective translation strategy:

At best, a good TT produces a carefully fabricated approximation to some of the manifest properties of the ST. This means that a sound attitude to translation methodology should avoid an absolutist attempt at maximizing sameness in things that are crucially different (ST and TT), in favour of a relativist attempt at minimizing relevant dissimilarities between things that are clearly understood to be different. (Hervey, Higgins, and Haywood, 1995: 15)

In Bassnett's discussion of the 'specific problems literary translation' she points out that there are "... complexities involved in the translation of poetry where there is a gulf between the Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL) cultures through distance in time and space." (Bassnett, 1991: 101) She also states that the concept of the function of the translation and the original text play a role in determining the selection of criteria for translation, thus some translators may chose to modernize the language and tone of the original text while others may prefer archaization. (Bassnett, 1991)

Poetry also often requires that the translator decide whether to use the same form in the target language or chose a different form in order to have the same literary significance (Coulter, 1992). Originally in the form of a classic German elegiac, in the TT version Elegy XXI takes the form of an English accentual elegiac. In his postscript Luke states that the TL version "...seeks to retain something of the originals characteristic qualities by fairly closely observing most of the 'minimum'

rules of elegiacs . . .” but points out that German is able to follow more demanding conventions. (Luke, 1988: 121)

Luke’s general strategy for translation of Elegy XXI is not to achieve equivalent effect, but to mimic the elegiac verse form as close as possible while using modernized language. His underlying concept for translation is domestication of the translated text, where the TT “. . . is produced by a chain of signifiers in the target language. . .” which the target audience can easily comprehend. (Venuti, 1995:17)

The specific strategies he uses in translating fixed expressions, metaphors, and collocations stem from this general approach.

2 Fixed Expressions/Idioms

Carter defines fixed expressions as being a hold-all term for idioms and other types of fixed expressions such as clichés and proverbs. Not only do syntactic levels of fixity or frozenness characterize these lexical forms, but also degrees of semantic opacity which range from transparent to opaque. (Carter, 1998) Transparent idioms are those whose meanings are easily decoded by the meanings of the individual words which make up the idiom, such as “it’s all in a days work.” An example of an opaque idiom is “tie the knot” where the meaning is not openly decipherable. Fixed expressions, particularly idioms also exhibit collocational patterns such as lexical sets which make up a particular text.

2.1 Semi-transparent Idioms

The ST idiom “jegliche Faser in mir” (line 2) can be classified as semi-transparent and has a similar counterpart in English with similar context of use. Although “with every fiber of my being” is a more direct translation of this idiom which is also very close in meaning to the ST idiom, Luke chooses to use an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form “curdles my blood” (line 2). (Baker, 1992) Since the more direct

translation was not used in this case it is likely that Luke is attempting to maintain the elegiac verse form at the cost of literal equivalence. In addition, both the ST and TT idioms do refer to the human body and get the point across that the speaker of the poem is angry, but the decision not use an idiom which is a near perfect match indicates that Luke may have other reasons for including the idiom of dissimilar form. Smith states that source for the idiom “curdles my blood” is the word “blood,” where a part of the human body has been put to expressive use. (Smith, 1925) By choosing this particular idiom Luke is remaining within the lexical set of words in the Elegy XXI, words which relate to the body such as “breath” and “heart” which appear later in the text. Carter states that

[words] are grouped into lexical sets as a series of semantically related options from which a coherent text can be constructedThe existence of lexical sets enables us to see the structure of the lexicon as consisting of clusterings into patterns of reference usually related to a single topic. (Carter, 1998: 53)

Luke adherence to this lexical set present in the TT creates a sense of coherence throughout the entirety of the text. It should also be noted that the ST includes the word “Busen” (breast) versus the TT use of the word “heart,” but both words remain within the same lexical set, demonstrating uniformity of ST and TT content.

2.2 Transparent Idioms

An example of a highly transparent idiom in this text is the ST discursal expression “Ich will es euch . . . gestehen” (line 3). The TT version “Let me tell you,” (line 3) is similar in meaning and form, but is more modern than the ST version. The ST version is considered to be dated since today one would more likely say “Ich will es euch . . . sagen.” The TT version is a translation of the modern German expression rather than from the original ST.

Considering the strategies used to translate fixed expressions it appears that Luke is most concerned with communicating meaning and maintaining textual coherency by

altering their lexical form. This altering of the ST is perhaps also influenced by the impact of the chosen verse form of the TT and the general modernization of the ST.

3 Metaphors

According to Newmark (1988: 104) metaphors are figurative expressions which are the transferred sense of a physical word, the personification of an abstraction, the application of a word or collocation to what it does not literally denote, polysemous words or most phrasal verbs. He further categorizes metaphors into the following types: dead, cliché, stock, adapted, recent and original. (Newmark, 1988: 106)

3.1 Stock Metaphors

Types of metaphors present in Elegy XXI include stock, original, and adapted. Three ST examples of stock metaphor are: (a) “Wege der Liebe,” (line 5) (b) “gebenden Freude,” (line 7) and (c) “teilet das Lager” (line 9). Luke takes a different approach for translating each of these examples. The TT version of example (a) is “pathways of pleasure” (line 6). Here Luke attempts to create the same TL image by substituting it with another established stock metaphor, but does so by interchanging the words “liebe” (love) with “lust” (pleasure) which appears later in the text. This switching of key words changes the original connotation of the metaphor in the ST which literally means “pathways of love.” Here the ST version has a spiritual connotation while the TT version refers to physical pleasure. Example (b) in the TT is “sweetest surrender” (8-9). This translation is very similar in currency to its ST version and results in a like image. Example (c) is a stock cultural metaphor which has been successfully substituted for the equally disguised TT version “sleeps with me” (line 12). Although its back-translation “shares a bed” has a similar connotation as the ST version and subtly avoids stating the word “sex” outright, the TT version is equally effective.

3.2 Original Metaphors

Original metaphors present in the ST include “. . .Schlangen zu fürchten, und Gift unter den Rosen der Lust” (line 6) and “. . . Deinem sinkenden Haupt lispende Sorge sich naht” (line 8). Although Newmark (1988: 112) suggests that original metaphors which were created by the SL writer should be translated literally, Luke’s strategy in the first example is to change the TT version slightly by interchanging “lust” with “liebe” as mentioned above. By having these words appear in different places in the text Luke is able to successfully maintain the image of both of the ST metaphors with only a slight change of meaning. Here he skilfully maintains the inference to body (passion) and soul (love) while creating near equivalent images. Luke avoids literally translating the second ST example altogether and rewrites it as an adapted metaphor “care whispers into my ear” (line 10). The back-translation of this metaphor is “Worry whispers into my lowered head,” but since the adapted metaphor exists in the TL it is likely the best choice for translation. In English “whispers into my head” is an awkward combination of words and would tend to confuse the reader. In this example Luke is following the rule of presupposed meaning which Baker (1992: 14) defines as “. . .[arising] from co-occurrence restrictions, i.e. restrictions on what other words or expressions we expect to see before or after a particular lexical unit.” In this example the back-translated metaphor fails to meet these restrictions.

In contrast to his approach in translating fixed expressions, Luke’s focus with metaphors is to maintain the ST image and presupposed meaning. He chooses to use common strategies in his translation of stock metaphors, but does take an unusual approach with original metaphors by substantially altering their original lexical form, which is surprisingly successful.

4 Collocations

Based on Sinclair's idiom principle, collocation is the event of co-occurrence between words. "On some occasions, words appear to be chosen in pairs or groups and these are not necessarily adjacent." (Sinclair, 1991:115) Sinclair also states that collocations "... can be important in the lexical structure of the language because of being frequently repeated." (Sinclair, 1991: 170)

According to Baker (1992: 53-54) collocations also play a role in distinguishing meaning. "What we do when we are asked to give an account of the meaning of a word in isolation is to contextualize it in its most typical collocations rather than its rarer ones." (Baker, 1992: 53) Two forms of collocation include restricted collocations and marked collocations. Restricted collocations are "... semantically arbitrary restrictions which do not follow logically from the propositional meaning of a word." (Baker, 1992: 14) Marked collocations, which are commonly used in poetry "... involve deliberate confusion of collocational ranges to create new images." (Baker, 1992: 51)

4.1 Collocations and Meaning

In the final line of *Elegy XXI* Goethe borrows the Latin word "Quiriten" (line 19). Here Goethe incorporates the style of the classic elegiac by using a Latin word. Luke, however, chooses not to use the loan word and instead rewrites it as "Rome's citizens," (line 23) remaining consistent with his general strategy of modernization of language. In this case Luke is likely trying to communicate the sense of the ST across the barriers of time and culture. Baker argues that

[some] collocations reflect the cultural setting in which they occur. If the cultural settings of the source and target languages are significantly different, there will be instances when the source text will contain collocations which convey what to the target reader would be unfamiliar associations of ideas. (Baker, 1992: 59)

In Goethe's day in Germany this Latin word would have been easily understood, but if it appeared in a modern English text it is not likely that the audience would comprehend its meaning because "Quiriten" has a low level of frequency compared to the English collocates "Rome's citizens."

4.2 Restricted Collocations

Two examples of restricted collocations present in the Elegy XXI ST include "dämmert der Morgen," (line 17) and "langen Nächte" (line 15). These are translated literally in the TT as "dawn breaks" (line 20) and "long nights" (line 17) respectively. Since their prepositional and expressive meanings are similar, the literal translation of these collocates is simple yet effective.

4.3 Marked Collocations

The Elegy XXI ST is filled with marked collocations. Hervey, Higgins & Haywood regard marked collocations as collocative clashes which have been used deliberately:

In such cases it will usually be appropriate for the TT to coin equally deliberate miscollocations. The main thing then is to make sure the contrived miscollocations in the TT are stylistically plausible in light of the TL, and are clearly recognizable as deliberate ploys. (Hervey, Higgins and Haywood 1995: 182)

Newmark agrees that in poetry "You have to identify unusual SL collocations if you want to render them into similarly unusual TL collocations . . ." (Newmark, 1988: 213). In the case of these examples Luke has done what Newmark, Hervey, Higgins & Haywood suggest, but he rearranges the grammatical structure of the collocates in order to do so. A few of the marked collocations in Elegy XXI include: (a) "Reizendes Hindernis," (line 11) (b) "versicherten Guts" (line 2) and (c) "sichere Küsse" (line 13). Example (a) in the ST literally means "nice obstacles." Luke, however, translates it as "Risks and checks," an equally marked collocation, yet the sense seems to be lost in this attempt. Also lost is the play on words in the ST, which

is unlike the awkward collocational clash of the TT version. Both examples (b) and (c) are effectively translated using Newmark's strategy. The literal translations of these collocates are (b) "reliable possessions" and (c) "confident kisses", but Luke translates them as (b) "what is reliably mine" (line 14) and (c) "kiss with confidence" (line 15). Although the grammatical structure of the ST collocations is substantially altered, their meaning is satisfactorily communicated and they remain equally marked in the TT.

Luke translates the marked collocations with varying success. Using Newmark's (1988: 213) strategy of maintaining equal markedness he is able to communicate their meaning on some occasions, yet in other instances he inadvertently loses the sense of the ST. His translation of restricted collocations is satisfactory, and he maintains his modernized style by substituting a low frequency loan word with collocates which are familiar to his target audience.

5 Conclusion

Translating Elegy XXI is certainly an extremely challenging task. Considering it was published 1794 and was written in a verse form which has no exact counterpart in the English language and had lasting effect upon its audience as well as great literary significance, most would find the idea of translating it daunting. Luke's underlying concept translation of Elegy XXI is the domestication of the ST and he accomplishes this through the minimization of semantic dissimilarities. The original effect of the ST is not transferred to the TT, but Luke gives an admirable attempt and resulting TT is a modernized version which satisfactorily communicates the original meaning and imagery, and is easy for the target audience to follow. Luke's translation of collocations is adequate with only slight changes to their grammatical structure. His attention to meaning while translating fixed expressions remains consistent by only

slightly compromising their original lexical structures. Finally, the images created by Goethe through metaphor are superbly transferred into the TT with only minimal changes to their original forms.

APPENDIX 1

Römische Elegien

XXI

- 1) Eines ist mir verdrießlich vor allen Dingen, ein Andres
- 2) Bleibt mir abscheulich, empört jegliche Faser in mir,
- 3) Nur der bloße Gedanke. Ich will es euch, Freunde, gestehen:
- 4) Gar verdrießlich ist mir einsam das Lager zu Nacht.
- 5) Aber ganz abscheulich ists, auf dem Wege der Liebe
- 6) Schlangen zu fürchten, und Gift unter den Rosen der Lust,
- 7) Wenn im schönsten Moment der hin sich gebenden Freude
- 8) Deinem sinkenden Haupt lispelnde Sorge sich naht.
- 9) Darum macht Faustine mein Glück; sie teilet das Lager
- 10) Gerne mit mir, und bewahrt Treue dem Treuen genau.
- 11) Reizendes Hindernis will die rasche Jugend; ich liebe,
- 12) Mich des versicherten Guts lange bequem zu erfreun.
- 13) Welche Seligkeit ists! Wir wechseln sichere Küsse,
- 14) Atem und Leben getrost saugen und flößen wir ein.
- 15) So erfreuen wir uns der langen Nächte, wir lauschen,
- 16) Busen an Busen gedrängt, Stürmen und Regen und Guß.
- 17) Und so dämmert der Morgen heran; es bringen die Stunden
- 18) Neue Blumen herbei, schmücken uns festlich den Tag.
- 19) Gönnnet mir, o Quiriten! Das Glück, und jedem gewähre
- 20) Aller Güter der Welt erstes und letztes der Gott!

APPENDIX 2

Roman Elegies

XXI

- 1) One thing I find more irksome than anything else, and another
- 2) Thing I supremely abhor-it really curdles my blood,
- 3) Even the thought of it does, Let me tell you, my friends, what
- 4) these two are:
- 5) First, to sleep by myself irks me, I truly confess.
- 6) But what I utterly loathe is the fear that on pathways of pleasure,
- 7) Under the roses of love, serpents and poison may lurk.
- 8) This if the hideous thought which at moments of sweetest
- 9) surrender,
- 10) As I half swoon with delight, care whispers into my ear.
- 11) That is what makes me so happy to Faustina: she gladly
- 12) Sleeps with me, but she remains faithful, as I do to her.
- 13) Risks and checks may attract impetuous youth, but for my part
- 14) Let me in comfort possess what is reliably mine.
- 15) What delight for us both! We kiss with confidence, safely
- 16) Breath the other's breath in, suck the dear life each from each.
- 17) Thus we enjoy the long nights together, we lie and we listen,
- 18) Heart pressed to heart, as the wind storms and the rain gushes
- 19) down,
- 20) Till dawn breaks, and the morning shines on us. Thus, as they
- 21) pass, new

- 22) Festive blossoms adorn every new hour of our day.
- 23) Oh, Rome's citizens, do not begrudge me such bliss! And to all
- 24) men
- 25) May Love grant it- this first, this crowning blessing of life.

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