MANAGING GAINS AND LOSSES IN TRANSLATIONS

Georgiana, Mîndreci[1]

Abstract

This article focuses on the well-known opposition in translation: gain vs. loss. The starting point is the comparison of two Romanian translations of the same American novel: J. D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye." The reason for choosing these particular cases of translation and re-translation is represented by the extensive use of euphemisms in the Romanian translation to avoid the explicit use of taboo words as written by Salinger. I have also mentioned the issue of infidelity in translation. An important aim of this article was the focus on the problem of the translator's visibility or invisibility in the target text (TT). The translator's visibility refers to his / her presence in the TT through notes, footnotes or comments in brackets. To support this idea I have provided some examples in point referring to the use of "explanatory circumlocutions" or footnotes in the first Romanian version of Salinger's novel, representing the lack of transparency in this version. Nevertheless, the question of whether to use such explanatory sequences in a translation or not is a highly debatable one; some critics being in favour, same against its use.

My aim in this article was that of analysing and providing examples of cases of linguistic untraslatability and the use of footnotes to avoid ambiguity or misunderstanding in the TT. This can be regarded as either a loss or a gain, depending on which critical theory one adopts. I believe that the excessive use of such footnotes can be detrimental to the TT, but they can be used moderately, only when imperatively necessary. The main difference between the two Romanian versions of Salinger's novel is that the first one used such explanatory footnotes abundantly in the TT, while the second version never did.

Keywords: *gains, losses, translation studies, untraslatability.*

1. Introduction

This article aims at highlighting the balance between gains and losses and its management in a translation starting from an analysis and comparison between an American novel, J. D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye" (published in 1951) and its two different translations into Romanian: the first one by Catinca Ralea and Lucian Bratu , entitled "De Veghe în Lanul de Secară," published in 1964, and the second one by Cristian Ionescu, with the same title, published in 2005.

The translation theory was defined by Lawrence Venuti "as a set of changing relationships between the relative autonomy of the translated text, or the translator's actions, and two other concepts: equivalence and function" (5). These two concepts are extremely important for the analysis of both translations discussed by this article. The definition of the concepts of equivalence and function support the issue concerning the social and cultural context in which both the source language (SL) text and the two target language (TL) texts appeared. These two notions are also closely related to the notion of faithfulness or fidelity which usually refers to the relationships between the texts themselves and thus "loyalty stresses the translator's responsibilities towards people, i.e. not only with regard to the authors of the ST" (Schäffner and Wiesemann 19). This is a very strong reason in favour of the importance of translation or retranslation of a literary text.

2. Methods

The main methods I have used in this article are the content analysis method of the reference sources and of the texts chosen to emphasise the examples in point, the comparative approach through qualitative research, and the observation method starting from empirical research in the field.

The main strategy I have used was the practical act of comparing the Source Language (SL) text with its translation into the Target Language (TL) and discussing mainly the cases of gains and losses in translation, misunderstandings and mistranslations, problems of equivalence and cases of linguistic untraslatability.

[1] PhD Lecturer, Constantin Brâncoveanu University, Pitesti, g_mindreci@yahoo.com

3. Background

In Romania, the translation of the novel did not appear as rapidly as in other countries, but it does not mean that it did not have the same success as the original. Nevertheless, I can say that the Romanian translators have managed to keep and render almost the entire metaphorical structure and atmosphere of the original book and its title while translating it into Romanian, "De Veghe în Lanul de Secară", just as Salinger did with Holden and his "The Catcher in the Rye."

Original Version	First Romanian Translation	Second Romanian Translation
(200) "You know that song 'If a body catch a body comin' through the rye?' I'd like – "'It's 'If a body *meet* a body coming through the rye!' old Phoebe said. It's a poem by Robert Burns." (Ch. 22, 154)	"– Ştii cîntecul ăla: *Dacă cineva prinde pe careva venind prin lanul de secară*. Mi-ar plăcea … – E *Dacă cineva* întîlneşte *pe careva venind prin lanul de secară*, spuse Phoebe. E o poezie de Robert Burns." (210)	"– Ştii cîntecul ăla, 'Dacă cineva prinde pe cineva venind prin secară?' Mi-ar plăcea … – E 'Dacă cineva se întîlneşte cu cineva venind prin secară'! mi-a spus Phoebe. E o poezie de Robert Burns, să ştii" (227)

After a first reading of the Romanian versions, the general impression is that the translators have an "intermediary position." It has been scientifically proved that it may, and often does happen, that not all the elements of the original can be rendered exactly the same way in the TL as in the SL. This is not necessarily a "loss," and thus there is the possibility of finding poetic equivalents of the SL which have an aesthetic value as close to the original text as possible. And this is exactly what the translators tried and mostly managed to accomplish with the translation of the American novel; they did not just simply translate only the idea of the original, they gave it an aesthetic form, a "personality" of its own, a place in the Romanian culture as well, next to all the other great foreign creations.

4. Case study

The main point for the case study is the very language of the novel's main character, Holden Caulfield, his typical speaking style and for the translators' rendering of Salinger's original way of writing. First of all, I would like to mention that the first two Romanian translators saw and appreciated the importance of the italics and intonational stress used in the original text and decided to render them in their version as well. The italics were used by Salinger as a mark of oral speech, in order to emphasise the rhythm of oral speech and to show that Holden's speech is indeed vocal. In Romanian the italics usually render the same words as in English or their adaptations, with some exceptions, of course, but not major ones. There were also many situations in which some SL italicised words were not rendered by the first Romanian translation or in which the stress was put on different words, but the overall conclusion is that the intonational stress was rendered in the first version and this is a gain in translation. On the other hand, C. Ionescu chose not to use italics, and this may be considered a great loss, as they play a very important role in the novel.

There have also been many situations in which the first version accumulated many losses in translation because of the inappropriate use of certain regional or dialectal terms (words such as "a trînti," "a trage bărbi," etc.) which lead to the often argued and discussed problem of obsolescence in translation. Such cases were not recorded in the second version (mostly due to obvious reasons related to the modernity of language use) and this becomes a gain. An important aspect of the gain vs. loss opposition in the comparison of the two Romanian translations is represented by the extensive use of euphemisms to avoid the explicit use of taboo words by the first version. C. Ionescu's version is more audacious and uses the same taboo words of the SL without trying to cover up their bad or negative meaning, at least most of the times, but there are also exceptions.

When referring to a translation, the traditional adage of "Traduttore, Traditore" is well known since nothing can be perfect; there are always "losses" and "gains." Roman Jakobson

in "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" comments this adage saying that if it were translated into English as "'the translator is a betrayer,' we would deprive the Italian rhyming epigram of all its paronomastic value. Hence a cognitive attitude would compel us to change this aphorism into a more explicit statement and to answer the questions: translator of what message? Betrayer of what values?" (qtd. in Venuti 118). In the specific case of Salinger's novel I believe that the message the translator has to convey is that meant by the writer himself, namely that of fighting against phoniness using its very means symbolised in the book by the use of trite language and by the power of ideas and attitudes expressed in the novel once again though language. Thus, in my opinion, language becomes a key element of the message the translator has to transmit to the reader without betrayal. The problem of the values that the translator has to convey is more delicate since two different cultures are involved, in this specific case two opposing cultures, at least from the political and social point of view at the time of the novel's publication. In terms of the first and second versions this issue becomes all the more complicated since the two translations occurred at different times in history when the society of the TL was changed both politically and socially, and thus the values within the original novel and their perception have changed dramatically.

Any translation tends towards perfection, and of course, the Romanian ones are not an exception to this tendency. A translation means both decoding and interpreting; and it also means knowing the culture of the SL. Jiang Tianmin argues that "[t]ranslation is simultaneous decontextualization and recontextualization, hence is productive rather than reproductive." This idea leads to and supports the concept of infidelity in translation. Jiang Tianmin also believes that "infidelity is built in translation because it inevitably describes domestic scenes that are loaded not only linguistically and culturally, but also socially and politically." Infidelity occurs in translation because the "translator cannot avoid being faithful to his/her own circumstances and perspective, [and] she/he cannot be really faithful to the text he/she translates" (Tianmin). Infidelity can thus also explain why "[t]he source text does not reach the target society unscathed, but refracted" (Tianmin).

I believe that this idea of infidelity in translation is also closely connected to the earlier discussed problem of the translator's visibility or invisibility in the TT. Cristina Schäffner and Uwe Wiesemann talk about visibility change as part of the translation strategies (namely pragmatic translation strategies) and this visibility concerns the author's or translator's presence through translator's notes, footnotes or comments in brackets (30). A good example in point is the already discussed use of "explanatory circumlocutions" or footnotes used by the translators of the first Romanian version of Salinger's novel and which represent the lack of transparency in this version. The question of whether to use such explanatory sequences in a translation or not is a highly debatable one. Vicky Hartnack argues that "it takes a while before we perceive how the culture of the other emerges in the text through the use of genre and rhetorical devices, and that this difference and distinctiveness should be preserved and transmitted. We cannot straitjacket the texts of others to fit in with our notions of suitability in the target language" (65). But there is another important question which refers to whether or not there should be "an on-going dialogue between the source-text producer and the translator, content and context may always be adapted, however slightly, to better suit the translator's idea of how readily the target reader/listener will perceive such cultural distinctions" (Hartnack 65). This idea leads to the already discussed problem of using "foreign notes" in a translation and to the translator's difficult dilemma of choosing between using or not using such text-breaking explanations in the TT. Vicky Hartnack also argues that important critics in translation studies, such as Venuti and Hatim defend the use of "foreign notes" in translations of other languages and that "they are highly critical of 'domesticating' the original by absorbing and appropriating it" (65). The concept of "foreignising" the translation means that there is much attention on the language of translation itself even though

many critics also bring counter arguments that "foreignisation" "puts readers off" because they expect to familiar expressions in the literary text they are reading (Hartnack 65).

Nevertheless, Mahmoud Ordudari argues very well that although too many footnotes are undesirable in a translation, "their uses can assist the TT readers to make better judgment of the ST contents." In his opinion it seems that such notes have a higher potential for conveying SL concepts which represent cases of linguistic or cultural untranslatability and it can also be claimed that a combination of these strategies would result in a more accurate understanding of such problematic concepts than other procedures. Mahmoud Ordudari also mentions that "various strategies opted for by translators in rendering allusions seem to play a crucial role in recognition and perception of connotations carried by them" and that all translators should pay special attention to such allusions and connotations in a literary text. If a translator fails to acknowledge such allusions or connotations there is the risk of not rendering them in the TL which leads to their entire loss and in the end to an ineffective translation.

In the case of Salinger's first translation into Romanian such footnotes were used quite often, when there was not a Romanian word to perfectly render certain English notions, mostly in cases of linguistic untraslatability, and in order to avoid ambiguity or misunderstanding. The second Romanian version did not use footnotes at all. This can be regarded as either a loss or a gain, depending on which critical theory one adopts. Here are some examples of such explanations provided by C. Ralea and L. Bratu's translation:

• for "this old beat-up Navajo blanket" (Salinger, Ch. 2, 6), the two translators provided the following explanation: "Pătură lucrată de indieni aparţinînd triburilor Navajo care trăiesc înghesuite într-o rezervaţie situată la hotarul dintre Arizona, New Mexico şi Utah" (12);

• or for "six foot two and a half" (Ch. 2, 8) the translation was "şase picioare şi doi ţoli juma" with the explanation "circa 2 m." (15); the second Romanian translation did not use a footnote in this case and the translation of the ST was adapted to the TL "pentru că am 1,89" (15). Cristina Schäffner and Uwe Wiesemann call this type of translation problems "intercultural translation problems" and mention that they "arise from the differences in conventions between the two cultures involved, and therefore cultural filtering will apply as well" (36). They mention as examples of such problems measuring conventions (as in the present case), forms of address, and text-typological and genre conventions. The two authors offer a solution for the problems raised by measuring conventions: "[d]epending on the translation brief, it may become necessary to convert references to measurements" (36). Thus, I can say that C. Ionescu's decision to use the Romanian measurement system (meters and centimeters) is a gain in translation since it does not put unnecessary weight on the TT.

• "station wagon" (Ch. 5, 34) was explained as "Tip de automobil închis, cu caroserie de lemn, cu nouă pînă la zece locuri" (50);

• or for the English word "Mac" (Ch. 9, 54) the two translators provided the following explanation: "Apelativ american, adesea folosit şi ca termen impersonal de adresare, îndeplineşte o funcţie aproximativ echivalentă cu romînescul 'şefule'" (75);

• "Jack" (Ch. 9, 57) was also explained as "Apelativ american, folosit ca termen de adresare în convorbirile cu interlocutori necunoscuţi" (81);

• "jitterbug" (Ch. 10, 65) received the explanation "Dans cu figuri, executat după o muzică de jazz în ritm rapid" (90);

• and for "Joe Blow" (Ch. 19, 129) the Romanian translators mentioned the context of its use in the USA "Apelativ folosit în S.U.A. spre a desemna o persoană al cărei nume nu e cunoscut" (175) and the examples could go on because they are very numerous, one can find them on almost each page. I believe that the presence of too many such footnotes and explanations can interfere and affect the natural flow of the reading process and that the translator's presence becomes too obvious and somehow disturbing for the reader who has to be able to immerse into an atmosphere at least similar (if not identical) to the one of the

original. On the other hand, the moderate use of such explanatory notes can help the reader realize the foreign origin of the text and become more aware of the cultural differences, as well as other types of differences.

Salinger worked with words, and the force of his words, as of any writer, is tremendous. But the translators were the ones who had to discover the meaning of words, which is often hidden, to discover the surprising associations and the perfect "matching" of the expressions. The writer used specific meanings for a specific time and place—meanings that the translators had to respect and render exactly the same way—because a translator has to be faithful and devoted to the writer and his intentions. L. Levițchi says that everything can be translated but only with extreme efforts, and thus the work of a translator is much harder than the writer's. The translators have used their right of changing the position of certain words in the text, but this without altering the original meaning. They have generally respected the limits imposed by the writer, but there were also cases of losses in translation especially in the use of euphemisms for Salinger's controversial and taboo words and expressions.

Thus, we can say that there are some gains on the level of accuracy and clarity, but of course, also some inevitable losses, which are obvious especially while reading and comparing both versions. Cristina Schäffner and Uwe Wiesemann believe that such cases of (interlingual) problems, and implicitly losses, in translation and difficulties in the translator's task "result from structural differences in the vocabulary and syntax of the two languages, i.e. they are more specifically related to the linguistic systems of the SL and TL" (38). The two authors also point out that the functionalist approaches of translation "stress that no clear line can be drawn between language and culture" and that "[tr]anslation means crossing cultural boundaries, not only language boundaries" (39). The translator does not have to make the translation in a foreign language more difficult to understand than the original. A translation is always "a cross-cultural process between cultures" (Meylaerts qtd. in Duarte, Rosa and Seruya 85) and that is why it is so difficult to render all the nuances of the ST into the TT and that is also why the translation of any literary text is always bound to the social, cultural and political contexts of both the SL and the TL. The reading and comprehension of a literary translation cannot happen outside these contexts and I also believe that the very unavoidable losses in any good translation, necessarily compensated by gains, do nothing else but add to the flavour of the TT and make it a unique creation in its own way. In my opinion, there is no need for the translation to compete with the ST, it only has to recreate the same effect on the readers, to complement the original and make readers understand the original text in case they do not speak the SL or better understand the text even if they do speak the SL. I also believe that many times numerous hidden meanings, allusions and connotations are revealed or become more obvious when comparing a ST with its translation in any TL, as there was the case of Salinger's comparisons with the Romanian and French versions in this chapter.

5. Conclusions

In this article I have tried to focus on presenting the two Romanian versions of Salinger's novel and their comparison in order to find the main reasons for the publication of a retranslation. I have tried to achieve this aim by centring on the case study of comparing and analysing in detail the differences and similarities, and the gains and the losses that have occurred both in the two Romanian versions. This has been mainly achieved by the careful and analytic comparison of some identical passages from the ST with its translations.

The main strategy I have used was the practical act of comparing the above-mentioned versions, focusing on the importance of Salinger's writing style and use of language, on discussing mainly the cases of misunderstandings and mistranslations, of problems of equivalence, of losses and gains, of linguistic untranslatability, of the translators' visibility or invisibility in the TT, on accuracy in translation, adaptability, fidelity and faithfulness or

infidelity—all these cases seconded by examples in point and by my suggestions of other possible translations of certain (more challenging) words or passages from Salinger's novel.

One of the conclusions I have reached is that the first Romanian version was the farthest from the original because of its abundant use of euphemisms and euphemistic formulations throughout the book, and the second version used more daring equivalents that the first one, but not all the time.

Another important aim of this chapter was to provide some examples of misunderstandings, mistranslations, deviations and inaccuracies and an important conclusion is that the law of compensation always functions in a translation, as in the case of the discussed versions of Salinger's novel. The law of compensation is a technique used in translation to make up for the losses present in the TT and it works by (re)creating other effects, similar to the ones specific to the ST, but in the TT when possible and using the TL resources.

A very important conclusion I have reached is that translations and retranslations are necessary and should happen more often since they play an enormous role in a country's literary system. Another important aspect concerning the importance of translations in general, and of Salinger's second Romanian version in particular, is that much of the target audience has access to a literary text only through its translation in the TL. To this I can also add the idea that even native speakers can get more meanings from a ST and its translation than by simply reading the ST in original.

All the analyses and comparisons in this article helped me in drawing the general conclusion that the second Romanian translation was indeed needed and long-awaited by the Romanian readership, to some extent better than the first version, it managed to achieve its aim of offering a newer, freer, more audacious and more modern version of Salinger's story, especially addressed to contemporary times, readers and demanding requirements of a modern translation. C. Ionescu's translation has also accomplished its aim by the fact that it addresses young people and it uses 80-90% of their typical language, with very few exceptions (most likely limited by the social and cultural constraints of our modern society). If we were to take two randomly chosen passages, without knowing to which of the two Romanian versions they belong, we could realise from the typical language used by each to whom each translation belongs.

Thus, I can say that the first translation is more appropriate for the parents of the young people to whom C. Ionescu's version is addressed, but this is an obvious appreciation given the 40-year gap between the two Romanian versions and generations. In conclusion, I believe that a translation does not necessarily have to be better than another one; all it has to do is to achieve its goal and reach its target audience successfully. It is also important to mention that certain mistakes, as well as some gains, are sometimes more visible by comparing two or more translations of the same ST, which represents one of the main reasons for this type of analytical approach and it underlies this way the translator's need to know how to manage the gains and losses of a translation and to find the best way to compensate one for the other so that the reader does not feel or notice them.

References:
1. Duarte, J. F., A. A. Rosa, and T. Seruya (2006), Translation Studies at the Interface of Disciplines, Volume 68 of Benjamins Translation Library, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1-10; 27-29; 64-67; 83-86.
2. Holmes, J. S., (2000), The Name and Nature of Translation Studies, 1972, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, Ed. Lawrence Venuti, London, Routledge.
3. Hartnack, V. "The Shifting Geography Of The Translator – Defining Territory Through Practice." *Artigos e Comunicaçõe Confluências – Revista de Tradução Científica e Técnica*, N.º 2, Maio 2005: 57-68, Web visit: 21 March 2009, available at: <http://www.confluencias.net/n2/hartnack.pdf>.
4. Ionescu, C. (2005), De Veghe în Lanul de Secară, Trans., Iași, Polirom.

5. Jakobson, R. (2000) "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." (1959), The Translation Studies Reader, Ed. Lawrence Venuti, London, Routledge, 113–8.
6. Leviţchi, L. (2000), Limba Engleză – Manualul Traducătorului, Bucureşti, Teora.
7. Mîndreci, G. (2010), J. D. Salinger Abroad. Analysis of his Novel's Tow Romanian Translations and Their Impact on Romanian Readership, Lambert Academic Publishing (LAP), Germany, ISBN: 978-3-8383-4406-5.
8. Ordudari, M. "Translation Procedures, Strategies and Methods." Translation Studies, Web visit: 2007, 15 September 2008, available at: <http://translationjournal.net/journal/41culture.htm>.
9. - - - . "Good Translation: Art, Craft, or Science?" Translation Studies, 2008, Web visit: 17 February 2009, available at: <http://translationjournal.net/journal/43theory.htm>.
10. Ralea, C. and L. Bratu, (2001), De Veghe în Lanul de Secară, Trans. 1964, Iaşi, Polirom.
11. Salinger, J. D. (1994), The Catcher in the Rye (1951), London, Penguin Books.
12. Schäffner, C. (1999), The Concept of Norms in Translation Studies, in Translation and Norms, Ed. C. Schäffner, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.
13. Schäffner, C. and U. Wiesemann. (2001) Annotated Texts for Translation: English-German: Functionalist Approaches Illustrated, Ed. Uwe Wiesemann, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.
14. Tianmin, J. (2006) "Translation in Context," Translation Journal, Web visist: 17 May 2008, available at: <http://accurapid.com/journal/36context.htm>.
15. Venuti, L. (2000) ed. The Translation Studies Reader, London, Routledge.