At the End of One's Witz.
(Translation Theory – and Some Practice)

ANDRÁS KAPPANYOS

Abstract

The main aim of the paper is to test some terms and ideas of translation theory in the practical context of literary translation. Ideas like implicitation may bring about serious considerations for the literary translator. Here we attempt to analyse the methods the translator might use to "emancipate" the target language reader towards the level of the native reader of the original text, to give him/her approximately the same chance to reach a deep and rich understanding in spite of the unfamiliar cultural background and references. These methods are classified, and presented with examples from James Joyce's oeuvre.

There's undoubtedly a huge gap between translation theory (traductology) as a branch of linguistics and the everyday practice of the literary translator. The process of literary translation seems to defy generalizing efforts. At the centre of it there's always a human being who carries with him/her all her assumptions, considerations, experiences, competences, even her passing impressions – and (sometimes consciously, sometimes not) actually uses them in the translating process: that's what makes it work at all. There are aspects that can be generalized, like the story of Romeo and Juliet that can be told in terms of changing hormone

levels, but it doesn't seem to catch all the real delicacies. In fact
traductology started off as a serious and autonomous branch of
studies when around the early sixties it gave up its aims to describe
literary translation, and left the field of personal feelings, choices,
preferences for less serious people.

It doesn't imply, however, that translation theory has nothing
to say to translators. When the translation process aims at
standardization, like with legal or technical texts from European
legislation to the operating instructions of the latest fitness device,
translation theory can provide very useful and practical suggestions.
Legal and technical terms and ideas are devised to work universally,
just like the laws of physics and many laws of the social sciences do.

If there's universality in a literary work of art (as there is,
undoubtedly, in *Ulysses*), it works on a different level. This
universality aims at the totality and complexity of human existence
that can be perceived, acknowledged, and be interfered or resonated
with by other human beings. This totality and complexity includes a
great deal of particularities that are clearly different from other
humans' particularities. The most profound realization literature can
provide is actually the recognition of ourselves in the other, the
different; the recognition that the most important values and aspects
of humanity are actually universal, in spite of all the different
particularities.

Literary translation doesn't aim at standardization (except
for the more basic, essentially formal levels like grammar or
versification). Instead it tries to preserve that otherness, those foreign
particularities. Here, arbitrariness, multilevel ambiguity and
ambivalence, are seen as higher functions and not defective
weaknesses of language. These are values to be preserved with great
effort.

Irishness

In Joyce's work the most generally challenging of these
particularities is Irishness. Let me introduce the problem through a
personal anecdote. A few years ago I met someone at Joyce's grave
in Fluntern Cemetery, Zurich. She was deeply moved by the spirit of

the place and she turned out to be a non-professional Joyce-enthusiast of Irish origin, living in Switzerland for decades. And when I identified myself as a Joyce translator she posed that most dreaded question one can pose to any translator: "How can *anyone* understand Joyce who is not Irish?" (which is a specified form of the commonplace question, *is translation possible at all?*) I answered something on the lines of "Being Hungarian seems to help a bit." I suppose she acknowledged my point.

Irish and Hungarian historical consciences, both looking back at long, heroic and predominantly tragic national pasts, seem to have their similarities that differentiate them from that of the more peaceful or more success-orientated national histories. There might be some components in Joyce's work that are more readily accessible to the average Hungarian reader than even to his British counterpart. There are some expected assumptions and competences that are more likely to be found in a Hungarian reader's mind.

Some immanent contradictions of Irish history are very similar to Hungarian ones. The ideas of the Enlightenment and of early modernity came from the direction of the oppressor in both countries. So there has been a noble, patriotic, and rather regrettable opposition to anything new, and the best minds desperately sought to find the balance between the national interest and the cause of progress. When explaining the significance of Charles Stewart Parnell it's a great advantage to be able to refer to Lajos Kossuth or even call Parnell "the Kossuth of the Irish." But this, of course, works only in the annotations. I cannot substitute Kossuth for Parnell in the text itself: that would lead to sheer nonsense.

But there's more to Irishness than a tormented national history and a few renowned freedom fighters. It's a central theme in Joyce's work that he actually uses the language of the oppressor. And the witty, ironic, and subversively virtuoso non-standard usage of that language is symbolically also part of the revolutionary tradition.

This is a hard trick to follow. Hungary hasn't adopted the language of any of its oppressors (not that of the Osman-Turk, the Austrian or, lately, the Soviet empire). Instead, it held on to its own language as a token of (cultural) independence or, at least, difference, a bit like Ireland held on to its religion. Hiberno-English,

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as a diversion from standard British, can't be remodelled in Hungarian: there's no other Hungarian-speaking country around, we can't experience this half-foreignness or alienated sameness. (I imagine that the Latin-American versions of Spanish and Portuguese might provide some similar possibilities but, then again, the historical connotations are so different that it might lead to major misunderstandings.) So a great and crucial part of the Joycean presentation of human existence is irreparably lost in translation.

Explicitation

The most important device the translator uses to partially repair this loss is to explicitly substitute some of the information that is only implicitly present in the original but tends to get lost in translation. This procedure, making information more explicit, is called *explicitation* in translation theory. The boundaries of this notion are a bit diffuse: it seems to include those cases when certain changes are inevitable if translating from a certain source language to a certain target language; elsewhere it also refers to cases where a certain idea is expressed in more words in the target language. Here we try to focus on cases where it's the free decision of the translator to include or exclude something.

We also have to consider the meaning of implication. Implicitness, of course, is the very core of the effect of any literary work. The reader has to find out things by him/herself, his/her activity is required, his/her assumptions are challenged, and his/her imagination is inspired. That is the feature that makes it radically different from didactical or moralising treatises, the feature that sometimes makes the reading of a novel or a poem as vivid and valid as any personal experience, or even more so. Implication, as a writing method, means that the writer assumes a certain constellation of knowledge and competences (and, possibly, preferences) present in the readers' mind as a prerequisite. The theoretical construction of the "implied reader" aims at the reader who can fulfil these expectations, who, being in possession of the right competences, is able to use (that is, understand) the implications.

The more implications a text contains, the less accessible it gets to the so-called "general reader," the one without any specific skills. Joyce's oeuvre is rendered "difficult" as a result of its unusually great proportion of implicitness. Of course, we can't designate a "proper level" of understanding. For example, one might read *Ulysses* without any knowledge of Dublin, or without even considering it a real city. This might even lead to a very valuable, delicate, and insightful understanding. However this reading lacks a whole universe of possibilities: it will never reach those insights that would presuppose some acquaintance with the city's history or topography. So, the more of the significant knowledge a reader possesses, the richer his/her potential understanding will get.

Emancipation

The translator, at the least, is a professional reader, who is expected to possess all the significant competences accessible to him/her. (Addressing the problem of "Irishness" we could say that having a tormented national history is only one of the several preferable competences.) An ideal translation would offer the target language reader (TLR) the same potentialities (or the equivalents thereof) that are offered to the native reader of the original work (NRO). And in this ideal setup the richness of the actual reading experience would depend only on the reader's personal readiness; the act of translation wouldn't deprive him/her of any potentials given in the original. The translator thus *emancipates* the TLR who has been degraded by his/her ignorance of the language of the original.

But this formula belongs to an ideal situation. It's not only the language that differentiates the "general" or "average" TLR from the "average" NRO. The linguistic difference also involves an extensive set of cultural differences, including ethnic, religious, political, historical, aesthetic, moral and other assumptions, down to the knowledge of street topography. The specific cultural information of the original can't be generally substituted with something familiar, unless we want to call our work some kind of free adaptation instead of translation. So the translator should present the unfamiliar **a)** making it familiar explicitly (that is, defining it); **b)** leaving it unfamiliar and making available the required information externally (e. g. in the form of annotations); **c)** imitating familiarity

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(so the reader can easily skip it, assigning the small "jolt" to his/her own ignorance); **d)** substituting something familiar that is structurally equivalent (as an untranslatable pun is interchangeable for another pun); **e)** skilfully omitting the problematic element and covering its place with "makeup" (making it as general, or meaningless as possible, so that it fades into the background).

These solutions aren't interchangeable and it's crucial that the translator uses the right measure for the actual problem. Apart from the nature and structure of the actual element, one also has to make distinctions according to its culturally central or peripheral position. Internationally acknowledged, central cultural goods (e. g. Shakespeare, the Bible) don't pose any questions to the translator, these are doubtlessly included in the assumed set of knowledge of the TLR just like that of the NRO: this is a segment of knowledge they mutually possess.

The situation is similar when the scope of the piece of information in question doesn't exceed the narrative universe itself. A gesture of Mulligan reminds Stephen of his other, now abandoned friend, Cranly. "Cranly's arm. His arm," goes his stream of consciousness. Cranly is mentioned seven times in *Ulysses,* (always inside Stephen's mind) but we don't get any definition of his identity. This implication requires a very specific piece of preliminary knowledge: the reader is supposed to have read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in any language.

There are segments that the NRO and TLR mutually lack, like very peripheral pieces of information (e. g. the identity of a contemporary Dublin merchant): these are just as distant and obscure for the NRO as for the TLR. But there's a significant difference: the NRO is much more confident about his/her competences than the TLR. If s/he finds a piece of information unfamiliar s/he easily renders it insignificant (that is, not required for achieving proper understanding). The confidence of the TLR is much more shakeable. Although his/her understanding won't suffer seriously without the exact knowledge of a certain shop's whereabouts, doubt and suspicion might disturb the experience. It's easy to get intimidated by the unfamiliar references with unknown significance. So for the

TLR a great deal of the detailed annotations (such as Gifford's), if used, will mean in effect: "don't worry, just read on."

The real problem is posed by those references that are really significant – but only locally. The NRO can be reasonably expected to know about Parnell, James Stephens, George Russell, the Great Famine, the university system, Wicklow, Galway and so on. The original text relies on this kind of knowledge; it is designed in such a way that it *gets* used. The text contains rather specific connection points to which the reader should connect with his/her rather specific preliminary knowledge, filling the gaps in logic and continuity. The TLR, not possessing this knowledge, is dependant on the translator. It is the translator's responsibility to avoid unsolvable puzzles and gaps that can't be filled (except when something is unsolvable for the NRO too). Let me show these (not always successful) efforts in a few examples.

Example 1: Target in Source

As is well known, *Ulysses* contains some Hungarian expressions and sentences as references to the Hungarian origins of the Virag family. The average NRO is probably unable to understand these, s/he simply detects that they are foreign, even exotic, and might be able to deduct from the context that they are actually Hungarian. So the TLR doesn't suffer any disadvantage here, except when s/he is a Hungarian TLR. In this case s/he understands the utterances (that is, of course, an advantage), but has no idea of their being in Hungarian in the original, thus missing the whole point of their inclusion. What can the Hungarian translator do?

The first translator, Endre Gáspár, gave it up and simply copied the Hungarian sentences. This is clearly a deficit in information, but the TLR won't notice any gap, won't be frustrated. So this is either the **c)** method (making it familiar) or the **e)** method (masking it altogether), depending on the preliminary knowledge of the TLR, on whether s/he was expecting the appearance of the Hungarian utterances or not.

The second translator, Miklós Szentkuthy, chose to tell the TLR about the discrepancy explicitly using the **a)** method. Here I translate back his solutions to English, with his additions

emphasized: "for the distant clime of Százharmincz borjúgulyás-Dugulás (<u>In English:</u> Meadow of Murmuring Waters) … *Visszontlátásra, kedves barátom! Visszontlátásra! – <u>sounded in Hungarian.</u>* Gone but not forgotten." Szentkuthy uses metalinguistic statements to notify the reader of the changing of the linguistic code (a change which is, of course, not present in the translated text, merely a virtual feature of an original that is not present). The problem is that nothing tells the TLR that this is actually a metalinguistic notification, so s/he probably presumes that it was present in the original as well, beside some English expressions (that would be "One-hundred-thirty veal-stew-constipation" and "Farewell, my dear friend, farewell").

There's no ideal solution but there should be a middle way between the total abandonment that Gáspár chose and Szentkuthy's explicit interfering with the original (leading to somewhat doubtful results). Looking for a better option we decided to keep Joyce's misspellings in the Hungarian so that some of the original's strangeness is preserved (one should notice that Szentkuthy, or his editor, corrected those). It seems also useful to italicize all the Hungarian elements (including "Nagyságos uram Lipóti Virag") to bring this "otherness" to the reader's attention. Instead of positively rewriting we try to generate a little "jolt" in the continuity that the reader can interpret as a warning, and go to the annotations – but that, of course, is optional.

Example 2: The shortest route.

In *A Portrait* there's a very important sentence that presents the protagonist's view of Ireland's and his own position in a condensed form, like an aphorism: "Told him the shortest way to Tara was via Holyhead." There's no approximate understanding here: one has to know what Tara and Holyhead means, otherwise it's just some very indistinct idea on the lines that to achieve something one should do something else first. This sentence has been designed for those people who know that Tara is the legendary seat of the ancient Irish kings, and that Holyhead is the main port on the British (Welsh) shore where ships from Ireland arrive.

The translations I was able to check in the collection of ZJJF with more than 30 languages, a few items with non-alphabetical writings excluded, all contained the words "Tara" and "Holyhead" (many of them even the word "*via*"), and those containing annotations invariably included an explanation to this sentence (that is the **b)** method). The Hungarian translator decided to protect his readers from this ordeal, and substituted a generalized, somewhat commonplace sentence: "The shortest route has no by-passes." This solution keeps up continuity while writing off some seriously important information, and covering up the tracks of what happened. This is the **e)** method in work, and from a theoretical point of view it would count as *implicitation:* the specificity of the information is reduced. The translated text is presented as an intact entity, while the complexity of the original is seriously degraded. On a closer reading we could also draw the conclusion that the Hungarian text actually hints at the opposite of the original statement, a paradox, saying the shortest route actually *has* by-passes.

In the new edition we joined the majority and restored the two place names in the text. We also added an annotation and, by way of explanation, relying on the similarities of Irish and Hungarian history, also included a **d)** type translation: "the shortest way to Pusztaszer was via Hegyeshalom," (Pusztaszer being the legendary site of the first assembly of Hungarian tribes after crossing the Carpathians, Hegyeshalom the main crossing point towards Austria, the West and progress). Obviously this is not something that one would include in the main text, at least according to contemporary views of translation.

Example 3: Lazarus.

Lets see a classic Bloomian pun: "Come forth, Lazarus! And he came fifth and lost the job." The pun is based on the forth–fourth homophony, and it works like an imitated or deliberate mishearing. Its structure contains two pillars: 1) a specific Biblical reference; 2) a less specific reference to some "job" that presumably requires four people (or some kind of competition where only the first four runners get a prize); and the third element, the bridge that connects the two, is the homophony.

It is clear that this third, bridging element is unique to the English language so it should be substituted in the translation. The first pillar is rather specific but universally available, so this is something the translator should keep, that is, supply from his/her own native standard version of the Bible. The less specific second pillar can be shifted a bit so that we gain some kind of linguistic link to our Biblical quotation (for example the presence of the ordinal number "fifth" isn't particularly important). So one should start off from the Biblical quotation, find some "pun-capable" element in it, and build a bridge from it towards a second pillar that only gets its shape in the process.

Let's see the results of the Hungarian translations. Gáspár has "Jöjj ki, Lazarus! Jött, de ötödiknek, és elvesztette a versenyt." Literal translation: "Come out, Lazarus! He did come, but [only] fifth and lost the race." He translates faithfully both pillars, without losing or distorting actual information, but there's no bridge between them. There's no suggestion of the "fourth" to which the "fifth" could answer, so we not only lose the pun, but also continuity: there's no motivation for the "fifth."

Szentkuthy translates it in this way: "Lázár, mondom, kelj fel! És ő ötödiknek jött, és elvesztette a partit," literally "Lazarus, I say, wake up! And he came fifth and lost the (card) game." Here we also lose the pun, but at least we get some motivation for the second pillar, so continuity is more or less saved. The translator makes the reference more specified (explicitation), referring to a card game. The idea presumably comes from the fact that the most popular Hungarian (adult) card game, *ulti* requires exactly four players, so the call "come forth" can be misunderstood as "come and join the three of us, be the fourth player." Arriving fifth means that someone is redundant; he won't be able to play at all (that might be even worse than losing). The irony is that this is a distinctly Hungarian (culturally motivated) reading of the original. The reader takes with him his culturally determined connotations even to the reading of the foreign text. This solution almost works as it evokes a shadow of the pun and the reader at least has the feeling that "there must be something to it."

In the new edition we used the process described above to achieve a complete **d)** type solution. We started off from the Biblical sentence in the form "Lázár, jöjj ki!" [Lazarus, come out!] The verb "come out" is "pun-capable," as it has a double meaning. In the concrete meaning something or someone (such as Lazarus) comes out from somewhere; in the abstract expression some expected result (as of a calculation) is arrived at. This is a notion that actually connects well to the world of card games, where the idea of an unsuccessful attempt (our second pillar) can be easily approached. So the passage continues "De nem jött ki a lépés és befuccsolt," literally: "But the step didn't come out, and he went phut." We used the more colloquial and straightforward expression *kijön a lépés,* literally "the step comes out," (etymologically it must be connected to the situation of learning some kind of dance), which is often used by card players. This solution doesn't specify the card game but it could evoke something like blackjack, where someone gets overdrawn (the value of his cards exceeds 21), "the step doesn't come out," he doesn't arrive at the required result and loses the game, goes phut, or (figuratively) goes bankrupt.

Temporary Conclusion

These examples show in practice the five methods we've proposed to deal with unfamiliar implications. Of course the translations of Joyce's works provide countless interesting examples and one might find some that defy these categories. We are continuing with this research, as this short account is by no means an attempt at some definitive model. Our main aim was to test some of the ideas and terms of translation theory in the actual practice of literary translation. The experiment seems to have been successful: these terms might provide valuable insights into the translator's work.