

Vanessa Leonardi (Ferrara, Italy) POWER AND CONTROL IN TRANSLATION: BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND CENSORSHIP

This paper addresses the issue of censorship in translation as a form of control over the readers which results in the manipulation or rewriting of the source text(s). Translation is undoubtedly one of the most fertile grounds for studying this phenomenon as it is not viewed as a neutral activity by many scholars. From a linguistic point of view, translation is made up of words which may carry with them a particular ideological positioning. From a cultural point of view, translation is an activity which takes place in real socio-political and economic situations where people may have significant interests in the production or reproduction of a specific text in a given community. Translators may face a great deal of pressure in their work in terms of quality standards, faithfulness, ideology and censorship. Translation may be subjected to several conscious acts of selection, addition and/or omission. Studying a translation from a censorship or ideological perspective means analysing all those cases of manipulation which occur in the text. Censorship and ideology have at times been viewed as meaning the same. Both may be a result of external and/or internal pressure which may lead to manipulation or rewriting of a text. There are various forms of censorship which can be detected in translation, such as preventive, repressive and self-censorship. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it introduces the concepts of ideology and censorship by providing details about their definition(s) and developments within the field of Translation Studies. Second, it focuses more specifically on the issue of censorship and an attempt will be made to list and explain its possible causes in translation. Several types of translation censorship will also be classified according to historical periods and socio-political movements by providing a few practical examples.

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“Translation [...] is not simply an act of faithful reproduction but, rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication – and even, in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes” (Gentzler & Tymoczko, 2002: xxi)

1. Introduction

Translation Studies is nowadays a well-established interdisciplinary field of research which has long fought to establish its authority and has always suffered from a low-status recognition in the past. Thanks to new developments in the field of Translation Studies, such as the so-called ‘cultural turn’ and increasing interest in new branches of linguistics, such as text linguistics, translation began to be approached from a different perspective. Ideology and manipulation issues were at the core of these new theories of investigation. Some scholars began to show an active interest in the manipulative mechanisms that took place in the translation process in order to consciously or unconsciously change or distort the meaning of the original text. The concept of manipulation was linked to that of power and both notions were eventually associated with issues of ideology and censorship. Translation began to be viewed as a manipulation tool in all those places where the socio-political and economic situation was at stake. From a political point of view, one of the best examples is the case of strong nationalistic countries, such as Italy, Spain or Germany, where censorship in translation played a double role, that is, protection from foreign influences and promotion of the country’s ideology. From a gender or feminist perspective, it is worth mentioning Canada, and more specifically Quebec, where translation has played a very important role in the process of vindication of women’s rights. Finally, from a post-colonial perspective, translation is often employed as a metaphor to show how it functions as an instrument of colonial domination.

Gradually, translation scholars began to pay more attention to all those external and internal pressures which could lead to the manipulation or rewriting of a text. Such manipulative processes seemed to

result from a variety of factors which, though diverse in their very nature, all seem to result from an ideological positioning. Censorship itself was thus seen as an expression of ideology of those who wished to consolidate their power in order to dominate and exert control over others. Power relations and manipulation found fertile ground in censorship and three main forms of censorship were identified:

- 1) preventive censorship
- 2) repressive censorship
- 3) self-censorship

2. Ideology and Translation

Censorship is an expression of ideology and both concepts relate to translation since this activity “<...> in all its forms is frequently the site of a variety of power plays between the actors involved. Some of these are quite deliberate manipulations of the original for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from the desire to save money to the desire to control behaviour, from the desire to follow perceived norms to the desire for cultural hegemony” (Fawcett 1995: 177).

The interest in power and translation dates back to the second half of the twentieth century. Both scholars and translators began to realise how translations could manipulate readers and could therefore serve as a powerful tool of control by institutions and individuals alike. Translation began to be viewed as a partial activity because translators constantly mediate the text(s) they work on. In the selection of texts, translators inevitably make some choices regarding which parts are to be translated, emphasized or even eliminated. Gentzler and Tymoczko remind us that “partiality is what differentiate translations enabling them to participate in the dialectic of power, the ongoing process of political discourse, and strategies for social change” (2002: xviii).

Thanks to the so-called ‘cultural turn’ people began to stress the need to contextualise translations so as to take into consideration socio-political, historical, economic and cultural factors. Gradually, Translation Studies have eventually shifted their boundaries from the ‘cultural turn’ to the so-called ‘power turn’ due to the growing interest in the issue of power over the years (ibid.). Finally, the issue of power relations has brought scholars to increasingly focus on agency and approach the role of translators from a sociological perspective.

3. The role of the translator: a sociological perspective

The role played by translators in the censorship process is very important. From a sociological perspective they become the judges of their own linguistic and cultural community. Their task is to decide what is wrong and what is right for their readers. Translators are constantly subjected to a variety of internal and external pressures in their work and these could lead to text manipulation and/or rewriting of the source text (ST). The ideology behind their strategies could result from both external and internal constraints which, somehow, cause cases of conflict between the source culture (SC) and the target culture (TC). In these cases translators are called upon to make a choice: they could either have censorship imposed on them (external pressures) or choose to censor their own work (internal pressures). In the latter case, translators become the ‘censors’ of their own work.

TRANSLATION CONSTRAINTS

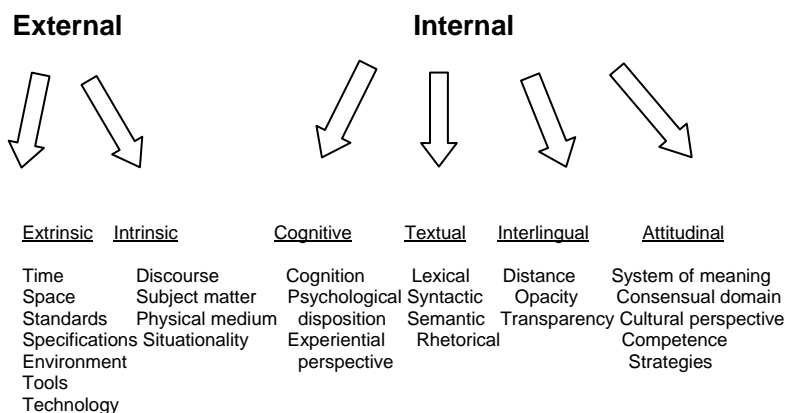


Figure 1: Inventory of translation constraints (Darwish, 1999:20)

Darwish views translation as “<...> a decision making process under constraints” which “affect the quality of performance and the quality of the translation product and always circumvent the realization of an optimal translation” (1999: 19). These constraints can be simply

divided into two groups, following the Darwish's model, as shown in Fig. 1, p. 84.

Defining censorship

4. Definition of Censorship

Defining censorship may prove to be difficult because censorship is viewed, and consequently defined, in many different ways according to our own perception and experience of it. Censorship is a very controversial issue which can provoke positive or negative reactions and cause heated debates in any field of study.

Broadly speaking, censorship is understood to be a form of supervision and control of the information and ideas that are circulated among people within a society. It could be either institutional or self-imposed and it is viewed to be fundamental for the protection of three of the most important basic social institutions of society: the family, the church and the state.

The term 'censor', according to the Oxford dictionary online, refers to "an official who examines material that is to be published and suppresses parts considered offensive or a threat to security". It originated from the Latin word *censere* "to assess" and it was used to denote "a magistrate in ancient Rome who held censuses and supervised public morals" (<http://www.askoxford.com>).

The best way to understand how censorship works, according to Bourdieu, is to consider and reflect upon "its relationship with the habitus of the field in which it circulates" (Biliani 2007: 6). Textual manipulation, which results from institutional or individual censorship, tends to be often shaped by the readers' taste and social position. From a translation point of view, therefore, one could claim that translations are not really censored because translators or editors or governments do not want them to circulate around the country, but rather they are censored in order to make them more easily accessible to and accepted by the TC readers. The degree of censorship depends "on the position of dominance or subordination of an agent (such as translator, author, publisher, or political and mediating body) in an overarching and fluid structure determined by the habitus within a given field" (ibid.: 11).

Although the term 'censorship' implies a certain negative connotation, it should not always be seen as such, because it is a form of discourse which can produce more knowledge as also claimed by Foucault (1977). Censorship could be positive in that it protects people from being exposed to any material which is deemed to be somehow immoral, offensive, heretical or blasphemous. On the other hand, though, too much censorship does not allow for freedom of expression.

As stated above, there are three main forms of censorship which have been identified:

1) PREVENTIVE (or prior) CENSORSHIP

This form of censorship could either be practiced by the spiritual or secular authority. These authorities review any material before publication or dissemination in order to prevent, alter, or delay its appearance.

2) REPRESSIVE (or negative or post-) CENSORSHIP

It is still carried out by either the spiritual or secular authority after the printing or publishing of specific material, which is considered subversive or damaging to the common good, in order to repress or ban it from circulating around the country.

3) SELF-CENSORSHIP

It is a form of control imposed upon us by ourselves out of the fear to annoy or offend others without being officially pressured by any authority.

5. Why do people censor translations?

There are many reasons for censoring translations and they are bound to a variety of factors. For the purpose of this paper, three main general categories are provided, namely:

- 1) POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC (wartime, dictatorship(s), socio-political and /or economic instability);
- 2) RELIGIOUS (Religious matters and Church censorship);
- 3) SOCIAL AND SEXUAL (Moral codes and Taboos).

6. Few practical examples of censorship in translation

6.1 POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC

In 1930s Fascist Italy was characterised by a very high number of translations which were threatening the Italian book production (ibid.: 19). The government supported a very strong campaign against foreign books. This does not mean that foreign books were completely banned from the country, but the number of them had fallen and the translations into Italian were strictly monitored. This strict measure was not adopted for foreign scientific publications which proved to be beneficial to the country. It is worth mentioning, however, that translations in Fascist Italy did not really suffer from a strict form of censorship until the racial laws were issued and, according to Fabre (2007), there are several reasons for adopting this policy:

ASSIMILATION THEORY – According to Mussolini the Italian race was genetically able to assimilate other races' cultural and linguistic features

TOLERANCE – Mussolini himself had been an active translator in his youth

FOREIGN POLICY AT STAKE – Attempt to avoid retaliation against Italian products by other countries

DAMAGE – The Fascist regime tried not to damage publishers, authors, booksellers and/or readers.

6.2 RELIGIOUS MATTERS

a) Catholic Church censorship

The Catholic Church probably carried out one of the best-known forms of religious censorship in an attempt to suppress heresy. This was accomplished by the Holy Inquisition which was instituted by Pope Gregory IX in 1231. The translation of many sacred texts was forbidden on the grounds of heresy and blasphemy. Books, such as those listed here below, were censored but they still managed to get eventually translated in different languages and circulate in different parts of the world.

b) The Talmud

This is a sacred book of religious laws and regulations governing the life of Jews worldwide. It consists of a large collection of Jewish writings that interpret and expand upon the Old Testament, in particular the Torah. Censorship of this sacred book was initiated by the Catholic Church that considered it to be an immoral and blasphemous publication. More than censorship, it was a case of total suppression on the behalf of the Catholic Church which lasted through the 18th century (Karolides et al. 1999: 263). However, throughout the years this sacred book was also censored by other important institutions, such as the Communist Party in the Soviet Union and the Nazi Regime during the Holocaust (ibid.).

c) The Koran

This is the sacred book of Islam and most Muslims believe it to be the literal and unchanging Word of God which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The Church has never shown tolerance towards Islam which was viewed “as a heresy, Muslims as infidels and Muhammad as a ‘renegade bishop, an imposter’” (ibid.: 212). One of the first translations into Latin was carried out in 1141 by Peter the Venerable but its circulation and further translations in Europe were forbidden by the Inquisition. It was not until the 17th century that the first English edition and a new translation into Latin appeared in the Western World (ibid.). Despite having been banned for so many years, the Koran is today one of the most important sacred books after the Bible.

d) The Bible

The Catholic Church also censored the Bible which is considered to be one of the most censored publications in the world (ibid.: 183). The Catholic version of the Bible is written in Latin Vulgate and its first translation into Latin was commissioned to Saint Jerome and was authorized by the Roman Catholic Church. Since then, the Church has banned all the translations into any other language fearing that the “text might be corrupted or misinterpreted” (ibid.: 178). It is worth noting, however, that the official version of the Bible written in Vulgate is, in reality, a translation itself. The Bible is indeed made up of two main books, the Old Testament originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic and the New Testament originally written in Greek.

e) Muslim censorship

Religious censorship, however, is not only restricted to the Roman Catholic Church. There are, indeed, other well-known forms of religious censorship which deserve more careful analyses, such as in the case of Muslim censorship. One of the best examples of this kind of censorship is Salman Rushdie's fourth novel, *THE SATANIC VERSES* which was first published in 1988. It was inspired in part by the life of Muhammad who is the founder of Islam and is regarded by Muslims as the last messenger and prophet of God. The novel caused much controversy upon its publication, as many Muslims felt that it contained blasphemous references. The book was banned in India a month after its publication and further banning soon followed in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other countries with large Muslim populations. Several demonstrations against Rushdie and book burnings also took place in Great Britain. In 1991, the Japanese translator of the *SATANIC VERSES* was stabbed to death. Shortly afterwards, on July 3rd, the Italian translator Ettore Capriolo was also stabbed in his flat in Milan, but he survived. In 1993, the Norwegian publisher of the book was injured in a gun attack. At that time, investigators suspected that all these incidents were indeed tied to the Iranian 'fatwa'.

6.3 SOCIAL AND SEXUAL

It is probably not a surprise that many publications have been banned on sexual grounds throughout the years. However, people may not be necessarily aware of the fact that among them there are some of the greatest masterpieces of world literature, such as Gustave Flaubert's *MADAME BOVARY*, Thomas Hardy's *JUDE THE OBSCURE*, James Joyce's *ULYSSES* and D. H. Lawrence's *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*.

6.3.1 Case study

LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER is perhaps the most famous novel written by D. H. Lawrence. It was deemed guilty of obscenity and it was so scandalous that it was censored in England and America. It was published in a limited English-language edition in Florence (1928) and in Paris (1929). In England it was first published in an expurgated version in 1932. The full text was only published in 1959 in New York City and in 1960 in London, where it was the subject of a historic obscenity trial

(The Penguin Books case) that turned largely on the justification of the use in the novel of until-then taboo sexual terms. In Italy it was finally translated by Giulio Monteleone and published by Arnaldo Mondadori Editore in 1946. Before then there still was a fascist ban on its translation.

There are several questions which arise from the reading of this novel. For instance, the novel was banned because it was considered to be obscene and offensive. Nevertheless, one could wonder whether this was the real reason for censoring its publication and translations into other languages or if there were other hidden ideological reasons for doing so. The novel, indeed, contains significant references to both social and religious institutions. Does the author support them or is in favour of a total re-organization of society? And finally, although the novel was banned on the grounds of offensive references to love and sex, it is worth noting that this novel draws upon political and economic issues as well. According to the novel, indeed, sex, love, politics and economics are all driven by the same desires and affected by the same illnesses. Is there a connection between society's sexual discomfort, and the political and economic anxiety of post-war England in this novel?

These are only some of the possible questions people could ask themselves when thinking about the reasons for censoring this work. It is clear that nowadays our perception of sex has changed and we are more used to reading about it or seeing it in movies. Lawrence's work was highly criticised because he challenged sexual mores, marriage and divorce which were considered important values and/or taboos in his times. This novel also sheds light on women's condition and subordinate role in society where their sexuality was limited only to men's satisfaction. These issues could possibly explain why this novel was really censored in those years.

7. Conclusion

Censorship is a very controversial issue in all fields of studies. Throughout the years there have been many examples of translation censorship bound to a variety of factors, such as gender, religion, politics and economics. Censorship could be imposed or self-imposed, but in both cases the translated texts will reflect a particular ideology, whether consciously or unconsciously, which deserves more in-depth

analyses. Censored texts reflect both ideologies as well as a lack of freedom of expression and any alteration of these texts could lead to their manipulation or their complete rewriting. As far as the notion of freedom is concerned, back in 1983 André Lefevere claimed that “Nobody ever speaks or writes in complete freedom, at least if they want to be listened to, read and understood” (Lefevere 1983: 25). Although there may be some kind of truth in this, it is worth noting that some of the most censored books in the world are indeed the most influential and popular ones. This seems to suggest that in most of the cases, censorship does not prevent a book from circulating, but it actually makes it more accessible to the world.

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Получено 30.10.2008

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