

PhD Thesis Abstract

Relationship between Text and Images in the Translation of Picturebooks

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1. Background and Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to study the importance of illustrations and their interaction with the verbal text when translating picturebooks. The translation of literary texts for children has been studied for a little over 30 years: the Austrian scholar Bamberger mentioned for the first time the necessity of translation studies in children's literature at the Symposium of the International Research Society for Children's Literature in 1978. At the beginning, this field retained the attention of comparative literary theorists more than those of translation. With time some approaches of translation studies including functionalism and polysystem have shown interest in this literary genre.

Whether the approach belongs to translation studies or not, most scholars have shared one point of view: translation of literary texts for children considers "the reader of the target linguico-cultural community" as the most important factor. Two of the most influential theorists, O'Sullivan (2005) and Oittinen (2000), also affirm that reader-oriented translation constitutes the mainstream in translation for children. Because children's literature is in and of itself defined by the existence or the relation to its addressee, reader-centered translation seems to be taken for granted. Child readers are not inferior to but different from adult readers in terms of linguistic competence and the knowledge of the world.

Reader-centered translation strategies don't make an exception for translation of picturebooks which are mentioned as representative of children's literature. What makes them one of typical genres for children is the presence of pictures.

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That's why picturebooks are called "iconotexts"(Nerlich 1990: 268). The graphic feature doesn't only play an aesthetic role but also contributes to narrative development. Inasmuch as literary translation aims at transferring the 'wholeness' of text into target culture, visual text, like verbal text, of a picturebook is involved in the translation process. It seems ironic to view images, which are non-verbal, as a factor to take into consideration in translating. Pictures are undoubtedly non-verbal but not non-textual. This way of visual communication copes and interacts with its verbal counterpart to elaborate narrative construction. Therefore picture-related aspects are as significant as the 'reader' to the translation process.

This research aims to achieve two following purposes: firstly, showing an inextricable link between the verbal and the visual in iconotexts; secondly, demonstrating how the visual text and intersemiotic relationship have an impact on translation strategies.

2. Research Methods

For that purpose, our study is based on the interpretive theory of translation, in particular, the notion of effect. The interpretive theory of translation is an approach developed by Seleskovitch and Lederer in order to demonstrate that translation is not 'a direct conversion' of the linguistic meaning of the source language but 'a conversion of the source language to sense and then an expression of sense in the target language'(Seleskovitch 1977: 32). Translation is thus not considered as a linear transcoding operation, but as a dynamic process of comprehension and reformulation of sense. This approach had remained a critical paradigm in interpretation and non-literary translation studies, before the notion of effect was introduced by Israël (1990). That has made this theoretical approach applicable to literary translation.

The effect, as defined by Israël, is a comprehensive notion associated with the sense which is the key concept of the interpretive theory of translation. This notion of effect doesn't refer to impression, feeling or impact that a reader experiences while reading, but rather to textual strategies able to produce cognitive, affective and aesthetic pleasure for the 'model reader' (Eco 1985: 68-71). Translation is thus aimed at constructing a target text with the textual strategies in order to engender similar effects to those of the original text.

This broad concept of effect is appropriate to examining a hybrid text,

as in a picturebook, composed of various modes of expression. The verbal, the visual and their intersemiotic bond are used together to develop textual strategies establishing a narrative construction. Furthermore the notion of effect can contribute to taking into consideration the status of the original while the translation for children is influenced or justified solely by 'target reader-oriented' tendency. The source text and target text converge on the effect, that is to say, an interaction between textual strategy and readers who actualize it.

To explore this theoretical perspective and its applicability to the literary field in question, this research has analyzed diverse picturebooks: French picturebooks translated into Korean, Korean picturebooks translated into French, picturebooks of English speaking nations translated into French and vice versa.

3. Research Findings

3.1. *Translator of the visual as well as of the verbal*

A translator's reading act is not just to make sense of his/her text but rather to explore it deeply and identify its narrative structure and strategies. This means that translators try to assimilate with the "model reader" as much as possible, in order to trace back to the textual elaboration of the original text and to estimate the reading experience of a target reader as well. A translator is thus an active and critical reader, who sees himself as a second author for his own readers.

Since picturebooks consist of the verbal, the visual and their intersemiotic dynamics, a translator is not only a reader but also a beholder. His analytical and penetrating reading act needs to be applied to the interpretation of pictures and their interaction with words. To explore and recreate an iconotextual fictional world, the translator needs to acquire knowledge of visual language and graphic grammar, as well as other sorts of encyclopedic knowledge. Hence this dissertation has made a list of visual elements such as line, color, the position of objects in relation to each other, frame, framing and typography, in order to dissect pictorial aspects. Nevertheless this list is not exhaustive but experiential, because visual vocabulary can't be analyzed like verbal language. Especially, two graphic elements of the list play an essential role in exploring

translation strategies: color and typography are thus considered as “directly translation-related visual factors.”

Iconotexts work not just on visual aspects but also on the interaction between pictures and words. Therefore this research has emphasized the role of this intersemiotic relationship which is used as a narrative strategy. Interaction picture-words were examined on the basis of two key concepts of narrative text, that is to say, description and narration. Intersemiotic relationship is classified as two categories: alternation and opposition. The Verbal-visual dynamic is one of the pillars which the iconotext is based on to engender humorous or ironic effects or narrative rhythm. Therefore this interaction is also a significant aspect to take into consideration in the interlingual and intercultural transfer. Otherwise the effect related to the intersemiotic dynamics would not be similar between the original and the translation.

3.2. Graphic aspects as a source of inspiration for a translator

A translator can be influenced by the presence of pictures while translating an iconotext. This means that he sometimes verbalizes the meaning he extracts out of the visual text, while rematerializing the iconotext in target language. This verbalization of images can alter the intersemiotic dynamics and bring about an unnecessary explicitation and an overtranslation. It is thus essential for a translator to be aware of any negative impact that graphic factors can have on his translation process.

However visual elements can help the translator to figure out a creative solution, in particular while transferring ingenious and humorous proper names and wordplays. In children’s literature, proper names often have a particular significance: they are neologisms invented by authors to convey a particular meaning or generate playful effects. At times the intent of inventive proper names get lost with plain and dull ones through phonetic transcription or a simple semantic translation. Drawing on the association between characters and their pictorial representation, a translator can create new proper names. The visual text can lead the translator to the “limited adaptation strategy” (Bastin 1993: 473-478) which means the adaptation of some expressions in target text, contrary to the “global adaptation” of the entire text.

3.3. Translation of intersemiotic collision: intraiconic text

Picturebooks show the dynamics between the verbal and the visual: that is a virtual relation that readers actualize while reading an iconotext to extract meaning out of it. There is another particular marriage of the two texts: verbal expressions penetrating pictures. A word inside an image catches the attention of readers, because the first is a heterogenic factor in the second. That’s why this iconotextual writing is a textual strategy with some specific intentions: contribution to narrative or emphasis of the main theme. Intraiconic text appear to be a constituent part of pictures, which leads us to consider it unnecessary to translate. However the verbal expression, inserted into visual text, is often a significant textual strategy to take into account in the translation process. Furthermore, given the limited number of words in a picturebook, intraiconic text is not a fortuitous narrative device. Translation of intraiconic text is thus transfer of textual strategy aiming to produce aesthetic and cognitive pleasure.

4. Conclusion

This research demonstrates the consideration of the importance of illustrations and their interaction with the verbal text when translating the composite text. For that purpose, this study is based on the interpretive theory of translation and, in particular, the notion of the effect developed in this theoretical approach. We first identified several key features of this literary and artistic genre to understand the workings of picturebooks and to show that the visual and its interaction with the verbal serve to create iconotexts, that is, constitute iconotextual strategies. The second part shows that the variety of verbal-visual interactions constitute fundamental iconotextual strategies to produce and interpret a picturebook. That’s why the intersemiotic dynamics have significance regarding the translation process which is to discern the internal mechanism of the text in order to recreate a text with it. In the last part, we attempted to determine how to interpret the visual text and the intersemiotic relationship and to translate an iconotext, that is, to recreate it. The interaction between the verbal and the visual is actualized by the reader-beholder: this means that the effect of the intersemiotic relationship emerges

from the confrontation between the intention of the author and the illustrator and the response of the reader-beholder. The verbal-visual interaction thus is meaningful for the production of an equivalent translation in terms of its effectiveness.

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