

**THE HISPANIC LITERARY WORLD AS
ONE OF THE RICHEST IN SELF-TRANSLATIONS**

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The present paper deals with the ideological and historical aspects of self-translation in Hispanic literary world. It presents the various ways in which auto- or self-translation is conceived by different theorists as well as by writers that have themselves translated their works into another language. This phenomenon hasn't been enough explored by scholars, it has been even ignored being considered as a very rare, exceptional and sometimes impossible practice. Anyway recent researches have been proved that the self-translation has a very long history dating from the beginning of the Common Era. As for the Hispanic literature and culture, it can be qualified as one of the richest in self-translations.

Key-words: *self(auto)translation, bilingualism, rewriting, literary translation, intersemiotic transcendence, translatability.*

Prezentul articol este consacrat caracterului ideologic și istoric al autotraducerii și rolul acesteia în universul literar hispanic. Autorul dezvăluie varii modalități în care autotraducerea este concepută de diverși teoreticieni precum și de scriitori care și-au tradus propria operă în alte limbi. Acest fenomen a fost puțin explorat de către savanți, ba chiar a fost dat uitării fiind considerat ca o activitate rarisimă, excepțională, uneori chiar imposibilă. Or, cercetări recente au demonstrat că autotraducerea are o istorie ce datează încă de la începutul erei noastre. Literatura și cultura hispanică cu siguranță pot fi calificate drept unele dintre cele mai bogate în autotraduceri.

Cuvinte cheie: *autotraducere, bilingvismul, rescriere, traducerea literară, transcendență intersemiotică, traductibilitate.*

INTRODUCTION

Any translation can be compared to a face transplant. In case of a well-done surgery, the patient will wake up and, looking in the mirror, he /she will be able to see, to breathe, to speak, having a healthy nose, mouth, etc. Some scholars stated that “translating a book is like pouring honey from one vessel into another... something must always be lost” (Southey 1969, 37). For Borges, the translation represents the structural method of the whole literature. Translating one's own work is something different

from translating the works of others. Translation means different things for different people. For those who are not translators, it is a text, for those who are, it is an activity and for the self-translator it is primarily a complex, creative act. As Anthony Pym says, translation is a text from the perspective of “external knowledge”, but an activity from the perspective of “internal knowledge” (*apud* Robinson 1997, 5). For a great number of theorists (Daniel-Henri Pageaux, Carmen Riera) it is the author who is the perfect translator of the original.

For a long time the practice of self-translation was generally considered as something marginal, exceptional, minor, borderline, eccentric, *rarissime*, and seemed to be neglected by the theorists of translation. We can firmly say that the phenomenon was even forgotten, maybe because most of us consider it as “a sort of cultural or literary oddity” (Santoyo 2006, 22). However, in spite of this apparent marginalization, recent researches in the field of the history of translation have shown that self-translation has a long and reach tradition, being a widespread phenomenon in many cultures.

Debates concerning self-translation are principally related to literary translation and this fact must be easily understood because this kind of activity requires the highest levels of authorship, authority and originality.

Special and essential publications have been dedicated to the topic of self-translation in Spain (*Quimera*, Vol. 210, 2002), the United Kingdom (*In Other Words*, Vol. 25, 2005), Romania (*Atelier de traduction*, vol. 7, 2007), etc.

As the linguistic and cultural miscegenation takes place in the world, the self-translation itself becomes a productive as well as a practiced creative act. In other words, the translation of the author is a *sui generis* translation. It means it comprises a great potential of re-writing, especially a creative one (López López-Gay 2005). By definition the self-translation is synonym to bilingual and bicultural translation. Thus, the process of self-translation very often goes hand in hand with the problematization of identities. The bilingualism that nowadays facing the trilingualism and multilingualism is sometimes used to regenerate writing. These changes are very vivid and stress the

reason why self-translation has been ignored. In Carolyn Shread's opinion, "one consequence of the marginalization of self-translation as a practice is that it reinforces Western models in which monolingualism, rather than multilingualism, is the norm" (2009, 54).

Definition and Types of Self-Translation

One of the first scientists to define the term of self-translation was the Slovak scientist Anton Popovič (1933-1984). According to him, it represents "the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself" (1976, 19). Another term for this practice that is encountered in scientific works is autotranslation, sometimes confused with the automatic translation. Gideon Toury thinks the self-translation is "translating what one has just said in one language into another" (1995, 244). For Lucía V. Aranda, a specialist in English-Spanish bilingual translation studies, "autotranslations can be regarded as more prestigious than 'regular' translations in part because they are not considered copies." (2007, 7) The researcher Ana Guțu from Free International University of Moldova analyses the phenomenon of self-translation in connection with the semiotics. The professor proposes the following definition:

« une internationalisation de la transcendance intersémiotique, dont la phénoménologie implique plus d'avatars de la création, de la surcréation, débouchant vers une prolifération idéique, causée par l'essence dialectique de l'acte communicatif en soi » (2006, 30) /an internationalization of intersemiotic transcendence, whose phenomenology involves more avatars of creation, surcreation, leading to an ideational proliferation caused by the dialectics of the communicative act (our translation).

In this context, semiotics and translation are two disciplines that underscore from diverse epistemological viewpoints, aspects of communication, and both deal with the interpretation, manipulation and use of meanings of signs. Even Vladimir Nabokov once mentioned in an interview "I don't think in any language. I think in images" (1974, 14).

The self-translations can be classified according to the moment of production. Rainer Grutman (2000, 17-20) distinguishes its two types: *delayed autotranslation* and *simultaneous autotranslation*. The first type happens when the author rewrites his work after its publication. The translations made by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a Cuban novelist, essayist, translator, and critic can serve as an example. The second type concerns the self-translator that is creating the translation in the same time with the original. The best example is Samuel Beckett who created some of his works in English and French.

Other translatoologists (Toury 1995, 244; Popovič 1976, 19) classify the self-translation into intrapersonal and interpersonal one. *The intrapersonal autotranslation* is characterized by the author translating texts he/she has written in one language into the other ones. The addressee in this case is the translator him/herself. When speaking about *the interpersonal autotranslation*, the authors translate texts which they have produced themselves from one language into another. In comparison to the first type, the second one is directed towards a communication partner.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW ON SELF-TRANSLATION

Historically speaking, we can say that self-translators have been especially writers who chose to create in more than one language, even without perfect mastering the foreign languages. Taking into account the knowledge the author has about the language in which his or her work is being translated, we can classify the writers in some categories. First of all we can speak about authors that don't know the language of translation at all. It means, in our mind, that the writer has no idea how equivalent and faithful is the source text to the target text. Secondly, there are authors who know the language of translation well and can check the correctitude of the work, but sometimes they are not able to judge about the reliability of some fragments presenting a lot of difficulties when transferring the text from their native language. And, thirdly, there are writers that master two languages and translate their own works by themselves. The second language they know is explained by native things, by bilingualism or by successful learning a foreign language.

If we have a superficial look on self-translation, it seems that it lacks any place in history. Having searched the sources, we realized that the opinions of scholars are disparate. Many of them consider this phenomenon quasi-impossible. For example, at the beginning of his essay *L'Épreuve de l'étranger* the French translator Antoine Berman mentioned: "For us, self-translations are exceptions" (1984). Grady Miller, during the Conference at the American Translators Association claimed: "Historically, few authors have dared to translate their own works" (1999, 11). Professor Christian Balliu, Head of the Department of Translation and Interpretation Studies (*Haute Ecole de Bruxelles*) in a paper published in the Canadian Translators' Journal *META* wrote: "It must be admitted that examples of self-translation [...] are extremely rare in literature and form the exception" (2001, 99).

Despite all these judgments' and opinions, the truth is that self-translation has been present in the history. Translation itself has made History. Self-translations are not at all exceptions. Researches have shown it. The poet, novelist, translator and critic Christopher Whyte wrote nine years ago: "self-translation is a much more widespread phenomenon than one might think" (2002, 64).

The self-translation takes its origin from the first century of our Christian Era. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote his first work *The Jewish War* in his mother tongue, Aramaic (a Semitic language belonging to the Afroasiatic language family), which is the history of the Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire in the years 66-74 AD. Some years later he himself translated it into Greek. The original Aramaic version of *The Jewish War* was lost; however, the Greek translation survives. The rest of his works written in Greek during his Roman exile after the destruction of Jerusalem, were preserved by the Church.

As we see, the self-translation has a history of two thousand years. Surely thousands of texts have been written in one language and then translated by their authors into another one. The list of self- or auto-translators is long and impressive. It includes the medieval Majorcan writer and philosopher Raimundus Lullius who wrote the first major work of Catalan

literature; the Italian humanist, historian and statesman Leonardo Bruni; the English lawyer and philosopher Thomas More; the French scholar Etienne Dolet; Joachim Du Bellay, the best-known Renaissance author to indulge in self-translation; the French jurist and political philosopher Jean Bodin; the French theologian and pastor John Calvin; the Venetian scholar and poet Pietro Bembo; the English poet Andrew Marvell; the Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch de Spinoza; the Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni; the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé; the Irish novelist and poet James Joyce; and the Nobel Prize recipients: the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, the Bengali poet and novelist Rabindranath Tagore; the Italian dramatist and novelist Luigi Pirandello; the Irish avant-garde writer (writing in English and French) Samuel Beckett; the Russian-American poet and essayist Joseph Brodsky and a Polish writer and translator of Lithuanian origin Czesław Miłosz. We can also cite other autotranslators: Julien Green, an American writer, who authored several novels, he wrote primarily in French; Romain Gary, a French diplomat, novelist, the only author to have won the Prix Goncourt twice; Elsa Triolet, the first woman to be awarded the Prix Goncourt; Karen Blixen in Denmark who wrote works in both Danish and in English; Chyngyz Aitmatov who wrote in both Russian and Kyrgyz, he was the best known figure in Kyrgyzstan's literature.

Moving to Spanish literature, it must be noted that nowadays in Spain, approximately two hundred writers are translating their works from Catalan, Basque, or Galician into Castilian, even into French. The same phenomenon is taking place in South Africa, Puerto Rico, India, Ireland, Canada, the United States and elsewhere.

THE MOST PROLIFIC HISPANIC SELF-TRANSLATORS

In Spain, names like Luis de León (a Spanish lyric poet and an Augustinian friar from the Spanish Golden Age, the translator of Horace's *Odes* into Spanish), Benito Arias Montano (one of the great humanists of sixteenth-century Spain, the editor of the Polyglot Bible of Antwerp), Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas, Francisco Martínez de la Rosa, Ramiro de Maeztu, Salvador de Madariaga, Alvaro Cunqueiro, and many others fill the history of

Spanish and world literature with self-translations. We must also add the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural journey on which a lot of Catalan, Basque, Asturian and Galician authors have nowadays embarked, all self-translators into Spanish and at times into French. In Galicia, it is enough to mention such names as Manuel Rivas considered a revolutionary in contemporary Galician literature, Alfredo Conde, Suso de Toro (he has published more than twenty novels and plays, his works have been translated into several languages, and have been taught in European universities) or Carlos Casares; in Catalonia, Josep Carner i Puig-Oriol – the Prince of Catalan Poets, Pere Gimferrer, Quim Monzó, Carme Riera, Valentí Puig or Antoni Marí; and in the Basque Country, Bernardo Atxaga or Felipe Juaristi.

Below we present the creation of some remarkable autotranslators.

Bernardino Gómez Miedes (1515-1589) was a Spanish humanist. In 1582, he published a biography of Jaime I of Aragón in Latin (*De vita et rebus gestis Jacobi primi, regis Aragonum*). Two years later his own translation came out in Spanish with the title *Historia del muy alto e invencible rey don Iayme de Aragon, primero deste nombre*, in the prologue of which the author wrote: „...Not only did I dare to translate, but also to add and take away, to redo and improve what with greater clarity and truth was offered to me renewed by history, after the Latin edition came out. It is just as well that the actual author has more freedom (which would be denied to any other interpreter), a more than poetic license” (apud Santoyo, 2007, <http://www.c-s-p.org/flyers/978-1-4438-1989-3-sample.pdf>).

Pedro Simón Abril (1530-1595) – a Spanish humanist, pedagogue and translator. Towards the end of the 16th century, this famous grammarian explained the reasons for the distance that separates author and translator: Translating what others have said is very different from translating your own words, because in your own text you can cut out words to fit the style of the sentences. But in the translation of the writings of others from one language into another, the words do not always come as readily as the interpreter would wish.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) was an Argentine writer, essayist, and poet. His international fame dates from the early 1960s. In 1961, he received the first International Publishers' Prize, the *Prix Formentor*, which he shared with Samuel Beckett. Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort argue that Borges "may have been the most important figure in Spanish-language literature since Cervantes (2003, 29).

María Luisa Bombal (1910-1980) was a Chilean author, whose works received worldwide success and recognition and are now highly regarded, including themes of eroticism, surrealism and proto-feminism. Critics say she used the translation to include additions and corrections. It is also known that she "translated" her two short novels into English many years after the original Spanish publication. But in this case the word "translated" must be used with some reservation, because Bombal rewrote significant sections of her work and the effect of the English version is very different than the effect of the Spanish version.

Josep Palau i Fabre (1917-2008) was a Catalan poet and writer. He was a representative of Catalan literature during the post-World War period and a world expert on the work of Pablo Picasso. In 1952, Josep Palau i Fabre published an illegal edition in Catalan of his book *Poemes de l'alquimista*. Over twenty years later, in the midseventies, the publishers Plaza and Janés found the author and ask him for a bilingual edition of his work, in Catalan and Spanish, which meant that the poems had to be translated into this latter language. Palau i Fabre recalled that:

Faced with the job of finding a translator, I spent a long time procrastinating. In whose hands would I place this offspring of mine, fruit of my innermost soul and efforts... Perhaps, perceiving the upsets and stumbling that this self-sacrificing task could cause me if it were put in the hands of another, my friend Montserrat persuaded me to take on the task myself... The problem of translation suddenly presented itself on quite different terms to what I had experienced before. Translating myself was not like translating another poet, however close I felt to him. My area of work was a lot more relaxed... *I could...allow myself to interpret – a liberty of movement – that I would never have dared take with another poet.* (apud Santoyo, 2007, <http://www.c-s-p.org/flyers/978-1-4438-1989-3-sample.pdf>).

This is rewriting, then, in freedom, quite different from what the translator does chained to another person's work.

Rosario Ferré (born 1938) is a well-known multilingual Puerto Rican writer, poet and essayist. She is one of the most prolific female writers from the Caribbean in the last decades of the past century. After years of translating her own work from Spanish into English and *vice versa* the famous author made the following statement: "Translating has shown me, quite definitively, that the transference between two cultural identities is impossible." (1991, 157). This statement involves the problem of translatability and untranslatability that is always under discussion. On the other hand, it strengthens the complexity of this practice. R. Ferré has an essay of the collection devoted to translation, where she describes the experience of translating her work into English. She said that self-translation is a disturbing betrayal and in the same time it is a mischievous second chance, which allows her not only to struggle against the self-censorship she finds in her own earlier work, but also permits her to fix mistakes and to live differently (*Idem*, 162-163). Some interesting facts concerning her bilingual English-Spanish activity are exposed by R. Lasky. So reading his book on symbolization and desymbolization, we learn that when translating, Ferré finds that something is gained in translation rather than lost. With English she encounters a kind of a psychological barrier she couldn't achieve in Spanish. But from another point of view English makes her to consult a dictionary searching the right word. In Spanish the writer finds herself overwhelmed with words. The author's experience concerning the novel *The House on the Lagoon* is very interesting. She translated it from the original English version to Spain. Reading the work, she came to the conclusion that the patriarch of the novel was more human and nicer in English than in Spanish (Lasky 2002, 171-172).

Carme Riera Guilera (1948) is a novelist and essayist. She has written short stories, scripts for radio and television, and works of literary criticism. We judge necessary to present here something from her experience as autotranslator. Surprised by the changes the Catalan novelist made to her translations into Spanish, Kathleen M. Glenn questioned her and Riera answered: "I don't

know. If another person were translating my work, that person would have to be faithful to the original, but when I translate my own work..." (1999, 47). As we see, all self-translators come up against the special problem and peculiarities of transferring to another language and culture what belongs to and is sometimes exclusive to the language and culture in which their texts were first written. The explanation can be as follows: the stamp of identity that distinguishes them from other translators is the freedom they enjoy when working with their own texts.

AUTOTRAD

Self-translation is a widespread practice in Spain, especially in Catalonia, although it is also present in many other countries. The research team of AUTOTRAD was founded in 2002 by the Professors Francesc Parcerisas and Helena Tanqueiro. In this way there is a new direction of research within the Department of Translation and Interpretation of the Autonomic University of Barcelona. In 2005 AUTOTRAD was officially recognized as a strong research team.

Its key objective is to analyze the contribution of self-translation to a new approach to the study of literary translation, in particular its contribution to the following areas: translatability and untranslatability; the translator's visibility or invisibility; literal or free translation of the original text; the existence of only one copy of an original text; and the importance of self-translation in modern approaches to translation such as reception theory, ideology in translation, and manipulation (http://www.fti.uab.es/departament/grups/autotrad/index_en.htm).

AUTOTRAD considers the study of self-translation to be a clearly interdisciplinary field of research. They are currently focusing on three lines of research: literary translation and comparative literature (analyzing the degree of (re)creation of author-translators in comparison with ordinary translators; redefining the notion of original text and translation); self-translation between close and distant languages, and its implications for intercultural studies

In present the AUTOTRAD is working with the following languages: the Catalan, the Spanish, the French, the Galician,

the English, the Portuguese and the Russian, but the team is going to enlarge its cultural and language diapason.

CONCLUSION

The study of self-translation should be one privileged in the theory of literary translation because the translator and author are the same person, and finally many difficulties encountered in analyzing translations are eliminated, especially those related to dual subjectivity that involves in literary translation.

Self-translations are not exceptions, they are creative and complex act practiced almost on every continent. Spain is perhaps richer than other European nations in instances of self-translation.

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