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Cultural Leeways and Discourses in Narrative Texts

Contents

Abstract

The following study is a summary project statement of my dissertation at Ege University, Turkey. It deals with the translation of discourse in narrative texts and claims that when translating between cultures with different discursive preferences the translator has a certain 'leeway' when reproducing the cultural embedding of the source text for target readers. The purpose of this article is to discuss this phenomenon and to illustrate the different communicative preferences between German and Turkish through the examples from the German translation of Yaşar Kemal's Yer Demir Gök Bakır (1963) and the Turkish translation of Günter Grass' Die Blechtrommel (1959). As such, it aims to show how German and Turkish differ in the representation of social and emotional relations – a cultural difference that manifests itself strongly in the above novels and their translations. After a brief discussion of the concepts of narrative texts, culture & discourse and translation, the concept of 'leeway' is introduced as it manifests itself in the categories 'personalization' (expressed by direct address, kinship lexicalizations), 'emotionalization' (expressed by the use of swearwords and religious and/or blasphemic expressions), 'routine formulae' (figuring deixis and tense), 'addressee orientation' (e.g. expressed by direct address) as well as 'non-verbal' gestures and their descriptions.

1   Narrative texts, culture & discourse and translation

According to de Beaugrande/ Dressler (1981:190), *narrative texts* are texts which organize actions and events in a definite sequential order. Not only the topic itself, but also the way it is communicated is significant, the perspectives expressed, the intervention in the time sequence or the linguistic register of articulation. The term 'narrative texts' thus embodies the techniques and forms of describing events. Narrative texts are often called fictional in order to emphasize its difference from the *real world*. The relationship between the displayed reality and the environment of the reader is an important prerequisite for the comprehension of the *fictive* reality.

In the communication-orientated narrative research, the relationship between the sender and the addressee and the conditions of reception are focused by Czennia (2004:995) who emphasizes that the speech of the narrator and the speech of the characters form two dimensions in a novel: only from this duality the multi-level situation of the narrative develops into the narrating procedure typical of this genre. Both the speech of the narrator and the speech of the characters depend on the content of information, on the author's cultural 'system' and on how this differs with respect to other cultures.

Narrative texts have been positioned as expressive texts within the framework of Reiß' translation-oriented text typology (1971:38), the expressiveness articulating itself particularly by the dominance of linguistic form and expression. Texts are embedded in certain cultures – this is particularly true of narrative texts – , i. e. they do not only reflect and require a certain technical or material knowledge, but also a knowledge acquired through experience and participation in the source text language and social environment.[1] As sender-oriented texts, the individual aesthetic dimension is foregrounded, meaning that we assume that the author's intention is to reveal his or her own ideas, values and convictions by – consciously or unconsciously - producing an aesthetic effect. The author's intention to create this aesthetic effect in the reader is assumed to change the perceptions, interpretations and evaluations of the reader although generally no particular target reader type is addressed. Obviously, texts have different effects on individual readers. It must be assumed, however, that some effects are shared by a group of readers (cf. Mudersbach 2002). The interest of this study lies in the question whether 'culture', which is here taken to manifest itself in discourse preferences as outlined e.g. by Clyne (1994), House (1996 and 1999) Gerzymisch-Arbogast (1993 and 1997) produces different 'effects' in different (cultural) groups and how this understanding influences the translation process. Our hypothesis is that different underlying cultural values in narrative texts require translation procedures that are aware of and account for the potentially different effects on different cultural readers. This will be exemplified by examples of original and translated works with the objective to make the discrepancies in the perception and description of social relations transparent.

It is assumed that translations of narrative texts generally reflect the target readers' interest in the foreign culture underlying the text. Because the narrative text offers foreign experience of a foreign author with a foreign representation: the target language reader is introduced to a product of a foreign culture by the role of the translator who in this respect acts as a mediator. For the translator in his/her interest of establishing communication between members of different cultures, the basic requirement is not only to communicate by language, but also to convey source-cultural values and characteristics to a target-cultural readership. Such information in narrative text is imparted in many ways. While the author is writing texts, s/he produces his/her work under the influence of the discourse norms that control his/her perception. The underlying cultural systems underlying such texts can be made transparent by analysis as described by Bachmann-Medick (1996:7-9), Floros (2003), Ndeffo (2004) and Kim (2005a and b). The translator needs to be aware of these cultural implications and must decide whether s/he wants to either make the reader understand the source-text culture or render a text that is oriented towards the target culture. This conflict in the translator has been known and problematized by numerous translation scholars from bible translation, functional approaches to modern multidimensional translation theories.[2] The earliest debates date back to antiquity with Cicero speaking against word for word translation and advocating 'free' translation, thus becoming the first to describe two translation types (see Kloepfer 1967:23). Schleiermacher in his famous *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* (1813) categorized these types as: "either the translator leaves the author alone if possible, and moves the reader towards the author, or s/he leaves the reader alone and moves the author to the reader" (cf Schleiermacher 1967:47). For the translator, as inferred from the quotation above, there is the possibility of either the source language orientation or the target language orientation. This distinction is differently designated in translation theory, philosophy, literature and literary studies (for an overview cf. House 2004:108). Within this framework, House differentiates the two dimensions of *overt* and *covert* translation. In the

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[1] For the interaction of knowledge and text cf. Dam et al (2005).
[2] Cf. Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2007.

case of the *overt* translation, House claims that the translated text serves the function of the original text in its cultural framework and discourse. The function of the source text, i.e. the use of the text in a certain context, can remain intact in the case of overt translation. Only a kind of *transferred function* is identifiable since an overt translation embeds the text into a new social event, gives it a new framework and puts it into a new discourse (cf House 2002:106). In contrast, covert translation pursues the goal of re-creating the function in its own discourse in the translated text in order to manufacture equivalence as far as the cultural context is concerned. Covert translations are pragmatically not marked as the target text language of a source text so that that they function as a second original. Within this framework, House emphasizes the necessity of a cultural filter in the case of the covert translation (House 2002,107):

In order to successfully use a cultural filter, the translator must consider cultural acceptance and conditions of both the source-linguistic and the target-linguistic community and translate the target text accordingly. In the case of a covert translation, it is expected that the translator will compensate the culture-specific phenomena; that is, the translator has a certain amount of 'leeway' when reproducing source-cultural characteristics into target-cultural characteristics.

Culture has long been considered an integral part of translation (Kade 1968, Reiss 1971 and Koller 1979, Hönig/Kußmaul 1982). In the late eighties and beginning of the nineties, its eminent role in translation has been stressed and discussed from many different perspectives by Holz-Mänttäri (1984), Snell-Hornby (1986), Vermeer (1986), Gerzymisch-Arbogast (1997, 1998, 1999 and 2005), Witte (2000), Thome et al (eds) (2002), Floros (2003), Kim (2005a and b). Today we can safely say that the machine translation paradigm of 'code switching' and 'substitution' has given way to the idea of translation as cultural mediation. This raises many problems ranging from philosophical questions as to the function of culture via its manifestation in texts and its contrastive description.

Within the paradigm of literary translation, this conflict has been problematized by Levỳ (1969), who represents a source-text orientated approach. The Poly-System-Theory from Even-Zohar (1979) places the literary text in a broader cultural context and has been accepted and perpetuated by Toury (1980) and the representatives of *The Manipulation of Literature* (e.g. Hermans 1985), who stand for a context-sensitive approach in translation studies. The theory of the *Göttinger Forschungsgruppe* around Armin Paul Frank (1988) follows Hermans' and Toury's descriptive and target-text orientated approach and have thus contributed to the rejection of 'prescriptive' theory building with respect to literary translation in general. The functional approach with its target text orientation (Snell-Hornby 1986, Vermeer 1986) cannot explain or analyse the underlying cultural dimensions of a source text and can thus not solve the problems of transfer to a target culture. Juliane House tackles this problem by understanding translation as the rendering of a text in the source language by a semantically, pragmatically and textually equivalent text in the target language (cf House 2002:103) and emphasizing that a translation is equivalent to the original only when the translation has a function that is equivalent to the function of original text (ibid.). She understands function as *the function of the text*, as the use of the text in a certain situational context. Based on Halliday ([2]1994) and his systemic functional theory, House develops – on the basis of English and German - a model by which texts, particularly narrative texts, can be analysed and compared in their contextual embedding which reveals differences in the discourse preferences of diverse native speakers (e.g. House 1997, 1998 and 1999). It is within this context that we will establish our notion of cultural leeway.

2   The concept of 'Cultural Leeway'

Cultural leeway is the 'variation field' for the translator when translating cultural phenomena from source to target texts in order to achieve covert translation equivalence on a lexical, semantic and pragmatic level.

We will illustrate the concept of cultural leeway by the following examples from the German novel *Die Blechtrommel* published by Günter Grass, and its translation and the Turkish novel *Yer Demir Gök Bakır* by Yaşar Kemal. *Die Blechtrommel* was published under the name *Teneke Trampet* (Cem Yayınevi, 1983) by Kâmuran Şipal for the Turkish readers. The novel, *Yer Demir Gök Bakır* is translated for the German readers by Cornelius Bischoff under the name *Eisenerde, Kupferhimmel* (Unionsverlag, 1986). Both narrative texts are published in several editions in the source language and in the target language and have thus reached a large number of readers. The texts are compared using as *tertium comparations* the categories 'personalization', 'emotionalization' 'routine formulae', 'addressee orientation', as well as 'non-verbal' gestures and their descriptions. For reasons of space, these categories, which are similar to Juliane House's discourse preferences established for German-English comparisons (1996, 1999) are not explicated here but are discussed together with their German-Turkish examples.

3   Examples

3.1   Addressee Orientation

In *Yer Demir Gök Bakır*, the narrator tends to address the reader directly, whereas in its German translation the agent is deleted as follows:

> İşte bu dünyanın aklığına Çukurova güneşi gibi bir de belalı güneş vurmuş, karların üstüne öylesine bir de ipilti çökmüş, göz açıp da <u>bakamazsın</u>. (Kemal 1980 :5)
> Und auf diese weiße Welt scheint zu allem Überfluß die Sonne so hell, wie sie nur in der Çukurova-Ebene scheint, die Schneedecke glitzert so grell, daß <u>man</u> die Augen nicht offen halten kann. (Kemal 1992:5)

"Göz açıp bakamazsın" is translated word for word in the Turkish version as *you cannot keep your eyes open*. The Turkish narrator takes the perspective of addressing the reader here, whereas in the German translation the impersonal form, "man" is preferred. The German translator decides on the impersonal form frequently as part of his 'cultural leeway'. On the contrary, an excerpt from the *Blechtrommel*:

> <u>Man</u> kann eine Geschichte in der Mitte beginnen und vorwärts wie rückwärts kühn ausschreitend Verwirrung anstiften. <u>Man</u> kann sich modern geben, alle Zeiten, Entfernungen wegstreichen und hinterher verkünden oder verkünden lassen, <u>man</u> habe endlich und in letzter Stunde das Raum-Zeit-Problem gelöst. <u>Man</u> kann auch ganz zu Anfang behaupten, es sei heutzutage unmöglich, einen Roman zu schreiben, dann aber, sozusagen hinter dem eigenen Rücken, einen kräftigen Knüller hinlegen, um schließlich als letztmöglicher Romanschreiber dazustehn. (Grass 1993:12)
> Bir orta noktadan yola koyularak hikâye etmeye <u>başlayabilirsiniz</u> bir serüveni; sonra geriye olduğu gibi, ileriye doğru atak adımlarla yürüyüp işi <u>karıştırabilirsiniz</u>. Ama çağdaş bir tutumla da davranıp <u>zaman ve uzaklıkların tümü üzerinden bir sünger geçer, hele şükür son anda zaman ve mekân sorununu çözdüğünüzü ilân edebilir ya da ettirebilirsiniz</u>. Ama daha anlatıya başlarken bugün artık bir roman yazılamayacağını ileri sürebilir, ancak sonradan, kendiniz de farketmeksizin ortaya zorlu bir eser koyup varlığı mümkün en son romancı edasıyla <u>boy gösterebilirsiniz.</u> (Grass 2000:10)

The word for word translation of "başlayabilirsiniz" is *you can begin* and "karıştırabilirsiniz" is translated as *you can mix it up* and "zaman ve uzaklıkların tümü üzerinden bir sünger geçer, hele şükür son anda zaman ve mekân sorununu çözdüğünüzü ilân edebilir ya da ettirebilirsiniz" is translated as *time and distance remains far beyond, thank god you can announce or make it announced that you have solved the problem of time and space* and "boy gösterebilirsiniz" is translated word for word as *you can stand*. The fact that the impersonal form is present also in the Turkish version, but that the translator does not prefer it, is here interpreted as an indication of the tendency that the impersonal form is not common in narrative texts and 'disturbs' the flow of the speech.

3.2 Emotionalization

When comparing *Yer Demir Gök Bakır* and its translation we can note that the translator tends to reduce the effect of the blasphemies and rude expressions. Hence, as it is demonstrated in the above quotation, the adjective "belalı" is translated in the German version through conveying its meaning: it is expressed as *over-shining sun*, whereas in Turkish it is *damned sun*. In the German version of the narrative text, blasphemies and rude expressions are softened or not translated at all. While in Turkish, those expressions denote a certain closeness and intimacy between the narrator and the reader, the German text appears to be neutral in attitude. Not only the blasphemies, but also most of the emotional expressions in German appear more neutral and objective. For example, in order to underline the emotion, the translator adds punctuation marks missing in the source text:

> Am Vormittag hätte man sehen können, wie es die Großmutter verstand, das schlaffe Kraut zu ordentlichen Haufen zu rechen, mittags aß sie ein mit Sirup versüßtes Schmalzbrot, hackte dann letztmals den Acker nach, saß endlich in ihren Röcken zwischen zwei fast vollen Körben. (Grass 1993:12-13)
>
> Öğleden sonra görecektiniz anneannemi! Doğrusu o ne becariklilikti! Elinde tırmık, kurumuş patates yapraklarını güzelce bir araya toplayıp öbekler yapmış, öğleyin üzerine domuz yağı sürdüğü marmelatlı ekmeğini yemiş, derken tarlayı son bir kez çapalamı, nihayet eteklikleri altına, nerdeyse ağzına kadar dolu patates dolu iki sepet arasına çökmüştü. (Grass 2000: 10-11)

Thus, the translation of "Öğleden sonra görecektiniz anneannemi! Doğrusu o ne becariklilikti!" is *You should have seen my grandmother in the afternoon! What a competence it was!*

The following excerpt also demonstrates how statements in the Turkish translation are emotionally stressed:

> Ob aber jener Läufer ein Koljaiczek gewesen, wußte meine Großmutter nicht, entschuldigte ihre Unwissenheit mit dem Feuer vor ihren Stiefelsohlen; das gäbe ihr genug zu tun, das bränne nur mäßig, deshalb könne sie sich auch nicht um andere Leute kümmern, die hier vorbeiliefen oder im Qualm stünden, überhaupt kümmere sie sich nie um Leute, die sie nicht kenne, sie wisse nur, welche es in Bissau, Ramkau, Viereck und in der Ziegelei gäbe – die reichten ihr gerade. (Grass 1993: 19)
>
> Ama koşarak yanından geçip giden adam Koljaiczek miydi, bunu bilmiyordu anneannem; bilmemesini de çizmelerinin pençeleri önündeki ateşle bağışlatmaya çalıştı, ateşin yanması zaten yeterince uğraştırıyordu kendisini; baksana, şöyle doğru dürüst yanmayı bilmiyordu meret! Bir de yanıbaşından koşarak geçip giden ya da duman içinde dikilen adamlarla mı ilgilenecekti! Zaten tanımadığı kimseleri hiç merak etmezdi anneannem; bütün tanıdıkları ise Bissau'da, Ramkau'da, Viereck'te ve kiremithanede olanlardı, bu kadarı da kendisine pekâla yetiyordu.(Grass 2000:17)

The translation of "Baksana, şöyle doğru dürüst yanmayı bilmiyordu meret! Bir de yanıbaşından koşarak geçip giden ya da duman içinde dikilen adamlarla mı ilgilenecekti!" can

be translated as: *Look how this damned thing doesn't even burn properly! Do you think she will care about the guys running around or the ones standing erect within the smoke!*

Furthermore, in Turkish, emotions are supported with gestures more generously than in German. For instance, in the first chapter of the novel *Yer Demir Gök Bakır*, the hands of Hasan and Ummuhan touch one another for six times – this is stressed by the narrator. In *Blechtrommel*, gestures and facial expressions appear to be subordinate or auxiliary to speech.

3.3   Routine Formulae

A further characteristic of the Turkish discourse in the analyzed texts is the frequent use of idiomatic routine formulae with a religious connotation. In the German narrative texts that were analyzed, those expressions are used more directly. In the first chapter of *Yer Demir Gök Bakır*, examples of idioms are: "Yoldaş olma namussuza, arsıza. Akıbet başına bela getirir." (Don't ever be a companion to the dishonourable and shameless, or else you'll get into trouble in the end); "Yalnız git, yoldaş olma yüzsüze" (Go by yourself and don't be a companion to the impudent); "Erkek olmayanın yalanı çoktur" (Those who are not man do lie a lot); "Orospuda iman olmaz, din olmaz." (Whores do not have neither faith nor religion).

In particular, religious expressions like "kurban olayım" (do sacrifice me), "Allahın belası kuş" (God damn bird), "Vallahi billahi söylemem" (I swear to God I will not say it to anybody) are used more frequently in Turkish than in German narrative texts.

The following example shows that the translator does not hesitate to add idioms in accordance with the different communicative preferences, although the source text does not include any:

> Zugegeben: ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt, mein Pfleger beobachtet mich, läßt mich kaum aus dem Auge; denn in der Tür ist ein Guckloch, und meines Pflegers Auge ist von jenem Braun, welches mich, den Blauäugigen, nicht durchschauen kann. (Grass 1993:9)
> Ne yalan söyleyeyim, bir akıl ve ruh hastalıkları kliniğinin sakinlerindenim. Bakıcım göz altında tutuyor beni, gözlerini üzerimden pek ayırmıyor, çünkü kapıda bir gözetleme penceresi var ve bakıcımın gözleri o malum kahverengi renkte, ben mavi gözlünün bir türlü içini göremiyor. (Grass 2000:7)

The word "zugegeben" is translated into Turkish with a routine formula, i.e. it is translated word for word as *why should I lie*. This routine formula is employed in order to attract the attention of the addressee and express sympathy. At the same time, this routine formula arouses a feeling of compassion towards the protagonist, which does not exist in the German version.

Moreover, also the morphologic structure causes a discrepancy between German and Turkish. In Turkish, tense and person can be in the verb as suffix. It is left to the speaker whether subject and time are additionally expressed or not. However, as with the example "seni seviyorum" the agent of the action is often not overtly told by the pronoun, "I". Thus, the language achieves a more dynamic style through the possibility of expressing more with few words: "vazgeçtim" becomes *I changed my mind* or "Ummuhanı göremedi" becomes *he could not see Ummuhan*. In this respect, thanks to the possibility to convey the subject within the verb, the narrator does not have to repeat the subject and cause monotony in the flow of the language. The 'variation field', allowed in the Turkish text, is missing in German. Therefore, if the translator additionally utters the pronoun, the meaning is over-stressed and the subject becomes the central issue of the sentence and causes a distance between the participants of the conversation. The following excerpt from *Blechtrommel* shows that the translator avoids the additional reference to the subject in order not to over-emphasize the agent:

> Nicht allzu lange hob und wog <u>ich</u> den zäh flexiblen Packen. Zehn Blatt zählte <u>ich</u> ab, der Rest wurde im Nachttischchen versorgt, den Füllfederhalter fand <u>ich</u> in der Schublade neben dem Fotoalbum: Er ist voll an seiner Tinte soll es nicht fehlen, wie fange ich an? (Grass 1993:11)
> Elimle terazileyip tartarak fazla oyalanmadım katı, esnek paketle; içinden on yaprak sayıp aldım, gerisini komodinin gözüne tıktım. Dolmakalem çekmecede, albümün yanıbaşında duruyor; içi dolu, yani mürekkep de tamam. Peki, ama nasıl başlamalı? (Grass 2000:9)

In the Turkish translation, the subject does not appear as an independent word in contrast to the source text. Only by adding the suffix the agent reveals himself, although there is the possibility to verbalize the subject in the Turkish text as it is in German. The translator decides to use this cultural leeway in the above mentioned form.

Furthermore, it can be stated that there are more possibilities in Turkish to express kinship than in German. Hence, the grandmother in the Turkish translation is not called "büyükanne", but "anneanne", which carries the meaning of *the mother's mother*. The translator has more cultural leeway due to the Turkish language system and resources. The following table illustrates this:

Turkish	**German**
Dayı	brother of the mother - <u>uncle</u>
Amca	brother of the father - <u>uncle</u>
Enişte	Husband of the sister or the aunt (sister of the mother) - <u>uncle</u>
Yenge	wife of the uncle (brother of the father) - <u>aunt</u>
Teyze	sister of the mother - <u>aunt</u>
Hala	sister of the father - <u>aunt</u>
Anneanne	<u>grandmother -</u> mother's mother
Babaanne	<u>grandmother -</u> father's mother
Abla	elder <u>sister</u>
Ağabey	elder <u>brother</u>

This differentiation shows that Turkish language offers a greater variety for kinship expressions. This goes along with the stronger emphasis on verbalizing social relationships in narrative texts: social relations with family members, with neighbours, older persons, etc. This seems to be in contrast to German where - on both levels, the systems and the text level – the individual is the centre of attention.

4   Summary

The comparison of the above texts has shown the following differences in communicative preferences: particularly social and interpersonal relations show much less diversity in the English-German language pair than in the German-Turkish texts under investigation. Also, addressee orientation in Turkish is more strongly stressed in contrast to the German text. The Turkish narrator tends to speak directly to the reader while in the German translation, the agent is more often absent. The Turkish narrator takes the perspective of the reader whereas impersonal forms are preferred in the translation of the German texts. Furthermore, it can be generally determined that in German one swears less than in Turkish. Most blasphemies (but also other emotional expressions) are rather softened or omitted in German making the text more neutral, whereas the use of the rude expressions in Turkish indicate a certain closeness and even intimacy between the narrator and the reader. Finally, it appears that the description of gestures and facial expressions seems to be auxiliary in German while they are central in the Turkish texts. Above all, social relationships, whether expressed verbally or by body

language seem to be a more important and frequent element in Turkish texts when compared to German. Seen from a multidimensional perspective this may mean that while these differences may be inconspicuous in written texts, they may well be compensated through the visual channel in films, videos and DVDs. This would open up a totally new field of research with the challenges outlined in this volume (cf. Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2007).

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