

THE INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION OF OPERA LIBRETTO "TOSCA" INTO COMIC STRIP

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Abstract: The constant development and change of culture made the translation of classical texts into genres of popular and mass culture such as comics a usual phenomenon. In addition, the wide use of the Internet made the creation of new texts easier and faster. However, the negative attitude is still preserved. This article analyses the ways the opera libretto "Tosca" was translated into comic strip by applying the scientific approaches worked out by Anton Popovič, Dirk Delabastita and Jury Lotman. Based on A. Popovič's classification the research also offers a new classification of the prototext-metatekst relations by scope. D. Delabastita's five mechanisms of translation on three levels allow to describe the changes that the prototext undergoes during the intersemiotic translation. Moreover, the research attempts to place this case of intersemiotic translation (the translation of the libretto into the comic strip) in the cultural space using the cultural semiotics ideas expressed by J. Lotman.

Key words: intersemiotic translation, comic strip, opera libretto, Tosca, prototext, metatext.

1 Introduction

The spread of the Internet and the introduction of new media forms have resulted in the fact that the information became available to bigger audience (and in general, the access became easier), the receiver became a potential author of new texts. The devices and the access to the Internet allow the audience create and upload self-created texts that have often connection to the popular existing texts in the cultural space.

The present research is dedicated to the analysis of "Tosca" opera libretto intersemiotic translation into comic strip. The research builds upon the intersection of such disciplines as cultural semiotics (semiotics), linguistics, semiotics of translation and literary studies.

The main questions that the research is supposed to cover are the following:

1. The description of the connection between the prototext and the metatext;
2. The characterisation of the main mechanisms that are used in the process of translation;
3. The functions of this intersemiotic translation in the cultural space.

2 Methods

The research is based on the theoretical ideas of Anton Popovič, Dirk Delabastita and Jury Lotman.

Firstly, in order to describe and analyse the interrelations of the opera libretto and the comic strip the ideas of A. Popovič are applied. During the research the traditional terms "source text" and "target text" that are widely used in translation studies are substituted by "prototext" and "metatext" accordingly (two text types according to A. Popovič. "Prototext is a text which serves

as an object of inter-textual continuity" (Popovič 1976: 226). The metatext may be described as a model of a prototext. In the present analysis the term "prototext" is applied to the opera libretto while "metatext" is the comic strip.

The analysed material is the opera libretto "Tosca" (prototext) and the comic strip "Tosca" (metatext) published initially on sinfimusic.com. "Tosca" is an opera in three acts by Giacomo Puccini to an Italian libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. It can also be seen as an already translated text because the work is based on Victorien Sardou's 1887 French-language dramatic play "La Tosca". However, in the present analysis we do not put an aim of finding the initial source since it can be also complicated if not impossible task regarding the way culture and text in culture develops and transforms.

Western opera is considered to belong to a dramatic art form and that explains the structural composition of a libretto as a genre. It has an act/scene structure. The important elements of the opera libretto are dialogues of the main characters in the form of verses, stage directions and playwright remarks. As a drama, a libretto starts with the enumeration of all characters. The fact that the opera libretto does not have descriptions of character appearances but begins with types of singer voices that are to perform the roles is one of the biggest differences of the opera libretto from the drama.

The metatext is a comic strip "Tosca". The comic strip is produced by William Elliot and was initially published on sinfimusic.com and now is also available on pinterest.com. In the book "The power of comics" R. Duncan and M.J. Smith define comic strip as a sequential art stating that unlike other kinds of art this type deals with some kind of narration (storytelling). "Comics is a useful general term for designating the phenomenon of juxtaposing images in a sequence" (Duncan, Smith 2009: 3). In the article "Multimodality, translation and comics" Michał Borodo claims that "in a comic book, the visual mode plays the primary role and the verbal mode has a subordinate and complementary role to play, but these two modes constantly interact, at times overlapping in what they communicate and sometimes diverting from each other in the meanings they express" (Borodo 2014: 2).

In the book "Total translation" Peeter Torop recognises four types of translation: textual, metatextual, in-textual and intertextual, extratextual translation. However P. Torop bases his theory on A. Popovič ideas, his classification appears to be more elaborate whereas A. Popovič recognises all translation cases as metatextual. The analysed case may be defined as extratextual translation, example of which can serve book adaptation into a movie (Torop 1995, 2000).

First of all, A. Popovič suggests two criteria for description of the prototext-metatekst connection: scope of linking and way of linking of two texts. He distinguishes two types of a prototext to a metatext connection by scope: using the whole text or just its certain parts. The way of linking of two texts may be affirmative or controversial (both alternatives can be either apparent or concealed). In A. Popovič's classification the summarised (abridged) version of the prototext is included in the second variant. He makes one of classifications on the basis of the prototext amount that is reflected in the metatext. He describes only two options: translation of the full text and translation of elements or levels of the text. However, in the light of developments that has happened in the media during the past decades, the scheme of A. Popovič can be altered. Our classification consists of three types. The first type is the translation of the full prototext into metatext. This does not mean that the word-for-word translation but the core plot elements are preserved (summaries). The second kind pertains to the translation of prototext part. The third type illustrates the situation where the prototext parts are rearranged (Popovič 1976: 232).

The main mechanisms and levels of translation are well-described in the book “There is a double tongue” by Dirk Delabastita. First of all, the scholar defines the process of translation “as a triple recoding process (on the linguistic, cultural, and textual-rhetorical plane), which requires the making of choices both because the source and target codes are asymmetric, and because texts tend to be complexly organized” (Delabastita 1993: 1). The main transformational categories are substitution, repetition, deletion, addition and permutation that function on three separate levels of linguistic code, cultural code and textual code translations. Substitution is an operation, in case of which the source text element is replaced by an element from the target text that has bigger or lesser degree of equality. Repetition can be characterized as a situation when the element of the source text is simply repeated in the target text. Deletion is an operation when one of the source text elements is not transferred into the target text. In addition the signs are added in the target text that has no parallel form in the source text. Finally, permutation is seen as a category where the source text element is reflected in the target text but these elements have different relational position in the texts. On the basis of these levels and the transformational categories he elaborates a model in which he combines these parameters in order to describe translation types.

As every translation always happens inside the cultural space it is important to analyse the functions of this type of translation. In order to do so, it is necessary to look at the culture’s structure in more details. According to J. Lotman, the culture consists of culture core that constitutes all “important” classical texts that culture cannot be imagined without and culture periphery including all other texts that are part of the particular culture (Lotman 1990, 2005), (Lotman, Uspensky 1978). At the same time, in order to understand this translation the literary communication scheme should be used that is worked out by A. Popovič in the work “Aspects of Metatext” where the scholar singles out the sphere of primary communication and the sphere of metacommunication. According to the scheme the author creates a Text that is read by the Receiver1 and this Receiver may become the author of the secondary text (Metatext) that has its own receivers (Receiver2) (Popovič 1976: 226). This scheme of communication presents the almost infinite chain of creation of new texts from the already existing texts in culture.

3 Results and Discussion

The first aspect that is analysed is the relation of the opera libretto and the comic strip. According to our new classification the comic strip represents the translation of the whole opera libretto in a compressed manner as the main elements of the plot are preserved: the exposition, climax and denouement are the same events as in the libretto. According to A. Popovič classification the comic strip is a case of an apparent translation – William Elliot explicitly links his creation to the opera by naming the comic strip “Tosca” and names the composer (Giacomo Puccini). This case is also an example of affirmative translation.

The second aspect that is described is the way the opera libretto is translated into the comic strip (using the ideas expressed by D. Delabastita). On the level of linguistic code we track obvious modernization of the language. Comic strip genre usually requires easily perceivable language: most creators use colloquial words and slang. W. Elliot was not an exception. The examples of colloquial, expressive language are “girlfriend”, “suddenly who should burst in but”, “on the run”, “make tracks”, “lay in to her boyfriend”, “takes some calming down”, “sneak out”, “shack up with”, “steam off”, “does his bit”, “sell out”. The majority of the comic strip sentences are simple. Some sentences are divided between two bubbles: “She takes some calming down... but eventually Cavaradossi is able to pacify her and sneak Angelotti out of the church”. Three exclamation sentences appear towards the end of the comic strip. On the other hand, the language of the opera libretto is full of obsolete words such as “wrought”. The entire style is literary and elevated: “It is the

time of the full moon, when the heart is drunk with the nightly fragrance of the flowers.”

On the level of cultural code the modernization is not noticeable since the creator seems to make visual mode as close as possible to the historical epoch. Firstly, the comic strip reader may spot two real places – Church of Saint’Andrea della Valle (in the beginning) and Castel Sant’Angelo (in the end) – both are situated in Rome. Both places are presented only partially, however, the picture is very detailed and realistic. Other places are unrecognizable or not connected to any spot. The costumes are also depicted according to the fashion and style of the epoch. Mario Cavaradossi wears dark trousers and a white shirt with a red vest. Scarpia has a jacket with the stand-up collar and a cloak over his shirt and vest. Tosca’s clothes are a low-cut red dress with a high waist. The soldiers’ uniform is depicted in the way that the reader is able to recognise their profession at once and the modern audience will perceive them as belonging to the past because of their outdated outward.

The textual level is supposed to represent the genre differences or similarities between the source and target texts or in our case prototext and metatext. The prototext is an opera libretto that is similar to drama genre by its formal characteristics.

The drama genre is strictly verbal without visual level unlike the comic strip where the verbal and visual parts both play an important role in storyline delivering. In this particular case the drama language is strictly formal and archaic and since there is no any other information channels verbal text should be understandable on its own that is why omissions and shortenings are not possible. On the other hand, the comic strip is a genre that uses visual and verbal levels on the storytelling process and gives the possibility for the verbal part be mere complementary. The structural organisation of “Tosca” comic strip is similar to the comic strip in general: the material is organised in the panels of different shape. The number of panels in one line also differs: from one to three. The verbal part is organised in bubbles and the one important difference is the fact that usually bubbles contain characters’ direct speech while in the case of “Tosca” comic strip W. Elliot places there parts of summary. So the narration is presented in the third person. The only case of the direct speech “This is Tosca’s kiss!” that is uttered by Tosca when she stabs Scarpia appears, on the contrary, outside the bubble – as an inscription on the panel. The imitation of sounds is presented traditionally for the comic strip format outside the bubbles usually with capital letters and in big font.

4 Summary

The last question that the research addresses is the place of this case of intersemiotic translation in the wider cultural space. Firstly, the opera libretto pertains to the culture core according to J. Lotman and the comic strip is a genre of popular culture (peripheral zone of culture). By the translation made across the border of core culture into culture periphery W. Elliot broadens the potential audience that may become interested in the text. As the opera appears to be the genre that may not interest a lot of people due to its “seriousness” the translation of it into more popular genre allows more people to get acquainted with the plot and by this process become closer to culture core texts. In this case the author of the comic strip must be acquainted with the prototext and the genre features of comic strip in order to create his text.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, the analysed case presents the intersemiotic translation of the opera libretto “Tosca” into the comic strip. The link between the libretto and the comic strip is apparent and W. Elliot’s metatext is affirmative. The visual mode (pictures) is added into the comic strip. In the comic strip the language is modernized. Some plot elements and minor characters were deleted in the process of translation; however, the main characters and the important plot elements were preserved.

Unlike the traditional use of characters' direct speech in the comic strips W. Elliot chooses to put the verbal mode in the third person narration (plot summary) that is visually organised in speech bubbles. The comic strip visual mode represents the historical epoch that the libretto is set in.

In general, the translation was made from the genre of the libretto into the genre of the comic strip that brought the prototext from the culture core into the cultural periphery allowing the widening of the potential receivers' audience.

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