Chopin’s *Désirée’s Baby* and its translation into Turkish: a stylistic approach

Assist. Prof. Dr. Pelin Şulha*

*Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Translation and Interpreting, English Division, Buca, İzmir, Turkey*

**Abstract**

This study aims to explore Kate Chopin’s short story *Désirée’s Baby* and its translation into Turkish with regards to the author’s use of stylistic devices such as irony, tone and foreshadowing which contributed much to the development of her indirect literary style. Along with the translator’s individual style, his interpretation of the literary style of the source text has an indispensable impact on his choices in the target language. In relation to Translation Studies style is concerned with the features, patterns, essential nature and function specific to the source text (Boase-Beier, 2006). In view of the relevant textual aspects related to the prominent themes of race, gender and class, the short story will be analyzed to make the possible decisions that would enable the authentic reception and rewriting of Chopin in the Turkish translated literature.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Peer-review under responsibility of Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Education.

**Keywords:** Kate Chopin; *Désirée’s Baby*; Style; Translation Studies; Translator

1. Introduction

Literary translation is a practice which goes beyond faithfully producing the source text in the target language. During translation the translator needs to perform a rich variety of processes resembling those of the writer, like decision-making and constructing a new text which is equally effective as the text it has originated.

*Tel:+00-90-232-3018617
E-mail address: pelin.sulha@deu.edu.tr*
from. Translator’s role as a (re)writer places him into a dilemmatic situation where he has to move within the unique boundaries set by the source text writer despite his desire to pour in his literary talent, imagination and craft (Bassnett, 2011). How the translator positions himself in relation to the writer he has chosen to translate is influential in the reception of the writer’s oeuvre in the target culture literary system.

Functionalist approaches in translation studies propose a dynamic model. This model defines the text as a source of information. The receiver decides what to pick out from the text depending on his needs or wishes. This clearly explains why readers with different socio-cultural backgrounds, world knowledge and skills interpret the same text in a different manner. In this respect, the translator’s task becomes difficult as he cannot always easily determine for whom the source text is intended and then choose the target culture readers to whom he addresses his translation (Nord, 2006). Similarly, Bassnett emphasizes that translation involves a metamorphosis where “the original readers disappear and are replaced by a new set of readers, dwelling in another place and in another time. When they read, they will read differently, for the context of reading also changes meaning” (2011:45-46).

In such a prospective view, translational activity is a form of communication through language and hence the translator as actor-receiver seeks to achieve a certain purpose. It is important that this purpose he selects appeals to the nature and expectations of the target audience since they are the ones to make use of the end product. Considering also the cultural elements that shape and constrain the communicational situations, functionalism describes translation as a transcultural practice in which purpose precedes and influences structure (Nord, 2006; Schaffner, 2009). Heidrun Witte especially remarks that translators as experts in the field should develop bicultural competence which includes “a general awareness of the problems of intra- and intercultural communication”, i.e. general cultural competence and “the knowledge of their two working cultures”, i.e. specific cultural competence (1996:73-74). More precisely, the former refers to

….notions like socialization and its influence on the individual; the culture-specific character of behavioral patterns; culture-bound perception and its effect on the interpretation and evaluation of other cultures…whereas the latter a basic awareness of how people communicate within their own social community and of what happens when they get into contact with a foreign culture…(Witte, 1996:74).

Katharina Reiss’s functional approach is based on equivalence at the communication level and aims to systematically evaluate the quality of translations. Inspired by Karl Bühler’s model of language functions she proposes a translation-oriented text typology including three text types such as informative, expressive and operative texts. She also points out that the source text type determines the translation method to be used and the target text should be judged regarding the predominant function of the source text. Literary texts are considered as expressive texts conveying the sender or the author’s attitude. In the translation of these texts, as the authorial style is a priority, the translator should adopt the perspective of the source text author and the artistic textual form (in Munday, 2012; Schaffner, 2009). In other words, “in the case of expressive texts (e.g. literary texts), the aim is the communication of artistically organized content and the translation method involves identifying the artistic and formative intention of the source text author and conveying it in an analogously artistic organization…” (in Schaffner, 2009:116-117). Friedrich Schleiermacher claims that the genuine translator acts as a mediator to bring together the author and his reader. To perform his task there are only two roads or methods:

Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible and moves the reader towards him or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him...in the first case the translator tries, by means of his work, to replace for the reader the understanding of the original language that the reader does not have. He tries to communicate to readers the same image, the same impression he himself has gained...of the work as it stands...But if the translation wants to let its Roman author, for instance, speak the way he would have spoken to Germans if he had been German, it does not
merely move the author to where the translator stands;...rather it drags him directly into the world of German readers and transforms him into their equal... (in Lefevere, 1977:74).

Briefly saying, one brings the author back home while the other sends the reader abroad; among the two strategies he proposes the domesticating one involves “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values” and the foreignizing one, which he himself preferred, signifies “an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text” (Venuti, 1995:20). Antoine Berman draws on Schleiermacher's distinction formulating the aim of translation, which is “diametrically opposed to the ethnocentric structure of every culture”, as “…to open up in writing a certain relation with the Other, to fertilize what is one’s Own through the mediation of what is Foreign…” The basis of translation as “an opening, a dialogue, a cross breeding and a decentering” (Berman, 1992:4-5) brings the style of the source text and thus its authentic reflection in the target language into the forefront.

Giuseppe Palumbo views style as a vague term used often in describing the linguistic and translational matters to indicate “a particular use of language serving given rhetorical or communicative functions, and therefore motivated by these functions as regards such aspects as syntactic formulation, lexical choices and textual properties” (2009:110). Style plays an important role in the production and interpretation of texts. Translator’s perception of style influences how he reads the source text. Style determines the form and content of the target text as it is the expression of the translator’s choices. It is inevitable that the translator’s individual style contributes to the process. To explore the stylistic elements, the translator should focus on the nature, function and properties unique to the text. Only the first part of the task ends when the translator has completed the source text analysis since deciding on the style of the text in relation to these original features to achieve equivalent effect on the target reader is equally demanding (Boase-Beier, 2006). This study aims to probe into Kate Chopin’s short story Désirée’s Baby and its translation into Turkish regarding the author’s use of stylistic devices such as irony, tone and foreshadowing which contributed much to the development of her indirect literary style. The short story will be analyzed in relation to the prominent themes of race, gender and class to identify possible choices that would enable the authentic reception and rewriting of Chopin in the Turkish translated literature.

2. A stylistic analysis: the Turkish translation of Désirée’s Baby

Chopin’s regional work Désirée’s Baby was published in 1893 and has been widely anthologized. Désirée is found near a Louisiana plantation and adopted by Valmondés. She marries to Armand Aubigny who has fallen in love with her “as if struck by a pistol shot” (Chopin, 1976:173). Her husband rejects her when she has a boy who looks partly black. She walks away with the baby and disappears into the bayou out of despair and disappointment. A few weeks later Armand finds a letter written by her mother and learns that he himself is black. Chopin reveals a regional tragedy discovering in the lives of the Bayou folk the secret histories of discriminations on grounds of race, gender and class (March-Russell, 2009:139). Although this story is considered typical of her art, it is her only narrative that takes up the problem of miscegenation (Wolff-Griffin, 1978). Her writing efforts make up for her losses and sorrows in her early life and help develop empathy and understanding for others’ pain particularly the displaced in the Southern society such as working-class Creoles and black women. For instance, Désirée’s Baby portrays “the verbal and emotional abuse toward women of which domineering and unloving men are capable” (Wyatt-Brown, 2002:203).

In the antebellum Creole society that the story takes place, master is superior to his slave, white to black and man to woman and it is believed that this system seems to leave no questions to anyone about his place and position. However the boundaries are not clear as they seem and there is always the possibility of violation. Chopin uses the tragedy as an emblem to show the ironic fact that one is mistaken if he judges the human situations as black and white. (Peel, 1990; Wolff-Griffin, 1978). This overall irony is strengthened by the use of foreshadowing at many points which adds to the gloomy tone of the author’s narration. In the following part, the translator Ayşe Bilge Aknam’s stylistic narration of the story in Turkish will be explored.
Source Text 1

As the day was pleasant, Madame Valmonde drove over to L’Abri to see Désirée and the baby (Chopin, 1976:173).

Target Text 1

Gün güzel olduğundan, Madam Valmonde, Désirée ve bebeğini görmek için arabasını L’Abri‘ye doğru sürdüyordu (Aknam, 2008:17).

L’Abri is her husband’s plantation and is supposed to be a home for Désirée and the baby. However, moments of happiness and compassion fades away with the revelation of the baby’s ethnic origin as black. The fairy-tale like place ceases to protect and serve its owner anymore. L’Abri means Shelter in French. Chopin’s deep engagement with French culture and language is visible in her use of French names and phrases all through the narrative. The translator following the author’s wording should leave the French name as it is, but to reflect the contradiction between the reality and appearance, use of a footnote to inform the reader of its meaning is necessary, or else the target reader may not recognize the irony concealed under its intrinsic Frenchness.

Source Text 2

When she (Madame Valmonde) reached L’Abri she shuddered at the first sight of it, as she always did. It was a sad looking place…The roof came down steep and black like a cowl, reaching out beyond the wide galleries that encircled the yellow stuccoed house. Big, solemn oaks grew close to it and their thick-leaved, far-reaching branches shadowed it like a pall (Chopin, 1976:174).

Target Text 2

L’Abri‘ye ulaşışında, ilk görüşünde her zaman olduğu gibi ürperdi…oldukça sefil gözüklen bir yerdi…Çatı, sarı sıvı evi çevreleyen geniş balkonların ötesine uzanmış bir rahip kukletası gibi dik ve siyahtu. Yakmında büyük, heybetli meşe ağaçları yetişiyordu ve bunların kalaşın yapraklı, ulaşması zor dalları onu bir tabut örtüsü gibi gösteriyordu (Aknam, 2008:18).

The translator should choose words and phrases in harmony with this physical description of the estate which denies its name and foreshadows the upcoming events which turn out to be “a drama of misinterpretations…undermines smugness about the ability to read signs, such as skin color, as clear evidence about how to categorize people” (Peel, 1990:223-224). A strange fear of the unknown and the eerie darkness will seize the target audience through the emotional renderings of the adjectives sad, far or solemn, and similes black like a cowl or shadowed it like a pall. Aknam’s use of sefil meaning shabby or poor, as the Turkish equivalent of sad, to depict the impression L’Abri leaves on Madame Valmonde does not represent a house that abandons itself to sorrow and longing as implied in the original text.

Source Text 3

…Désirée awoke one day to the conviction that there was something in the air menacing her peace. It was at first to subtle to grasp. It had only been a disquieting suggestion, an
air of mystery...Then a strange, an awful change in her husband’s manner, which she dared not to ask him to explain. When he spoke to her, it was with averted eyes, from which the old love-light seemed to have gone out. He absented himself from home; and when there, avoided her presence and that of her child without excuse (Chopin, 1976:175).

**Target Text 3**

Desiree...havada huzurunu bozan bir şey olduğu inancıyla uyanıd.. Başta kavraması zordu. Huzursuz edici bir düşünüyordu...Arından kocasının tavırlarında Desiree’nin sormaya kalkışmadığı tuhaf, korkunç bir değişim. Desiree’yle konuştuğunda, eski aşk ateşinin söndüğü bakışlarını başka yöne çevirdiyordu; herhangi bir bahane olmaksızın onu ve çocuğunun varlığını görmezden geliyordu (Aknam, 2008:20).

This extract is essential in the sense that it shows how Armand turns brutally against Désirée whom he adores. The emotional distance between them has grown so much that he even rejects the existence of both, not just his wife. Chopin portrays Armand as a relentless man who is blinded by the dominant patriarchal convention. He bears a proud name and has a respectable position in society which he cannot lose to a son of a black woman. The translator’s choices should emphasize the feelings of denial, anger and non-existence which pave the way for Désirée’s suicide and hence boost the impact of the ironic twist at the end. Although Aknam reveals the disappointment that emotional distance brings, the scene would be more influential if rendered as “Desiree’nin bebeğin varlığı umrunda değildi”

**3. Conclusion**

To sum up, literary translation differs from all other modes of translation because it is not limited to transferring the source text content; it requires the translator to bring forth his aesthetic and artistic skills as a writer to achieve the similar effect on the target receiver without losing the cultural otherness of the author. Preserving this otherness leads to more interactions and developments. Therefore, a full appreciation and representation of Chopin’s inimitable style in the Turkish culture is possible only by means of the translator’s thorough pre-analysis to identify the prominent stylistic aspects specific to the short story and their close reflections in the translation.

**References**

Bassnett, Susan (2011). *Topics in Translation: Reflections on Translation*. Bristol, GBR: Channel View Publications.
Berman, Antoine (1984). *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*. Trans.by S.Heyvaert (1992). Albany: State University of New York.
Boase-Beier, Jean (2006). *Stylistic Approaches to Translation (Theories Explored)*. Oxford: St. Jerome Publishing.
Chopin, Kate (1976). *Desiree’s Baby*. In Barbara H.Solomon (ed.), *The Awakening and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin* (pp.173-179), New York: New American Library.
Chopin, Kate (1976). *Desiree’nin Bebeği*. In *Uyanış ve Seçme Öyküler*. Trans.by Ayşe Bilge Aknam (2008). İstanbul: Otonom Yayıncılık, 17-23.
March-Russell, Paul (2009). *Short Story: An Introduction*. Edinburgh, GBR: Edinburgh University Press.
Munday, Jeremy (2012). *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*. New York: Routledge.
Nord, Christiane (2006). *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: A Prospective Approach*. *TEFLIN Journal Vol.17*. Malang: State University of Malang. 131-143.
Palumbo, Giuseppe (2009). *Key Terms in Translation Studies*. London: Continuum International Publishing.
Peel, Ellen (1990). *Semiotic Subversion in “Désirée’s Baby”*. *American Literature Vol.62*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 223-237.
Schaffner, Christina (2009). *Functionalist Approaches*. In Mona Baker & Gabriela Saldanha (Eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (pp.115-122). New York: Routledge.
Schleiermacher, Friedrich (1813). *On the Different Methods of Translating*, In *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig*. Trans.by André Lefevere (1977) Assen: Van Gorcum. 67-89.
Venuti, Lawrence (1995). *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*. New York: Routledge.

Witte, Heidrun (1996). Contrastive Culture Learning in Translator Training. In Cay Dollerup & Vibeke Appel (Eds.) *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 3: New Horizons: Papers from the Third Language International Conference* (pp.73-81). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin (1978). Kate Chopin and the Fiction of Limits. *The Southern Literary Journal Vol.10*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 123-133. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077591

Wyatt-Brown, Bertram (2002). *Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History: Hearts of Darkness: Wellsprings of a Southern Literary Tradition*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press.