ARON AJI’S TRANSLATION CHOICES AND STRATEGIES: THE GARDEN OF DEPARTED CATS

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Abstract

Bilge Karasu was a prominent author in twentieth century Turkish literature. His writing style was experimental, with an emphasis on developing the Turkish language through the use of neologisms and less-known Anatolian vocabulary. In addition, his texts were open to interpretation and required the reader to be an active agent in the construction of their meaning. His magnum opus Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi (1980) is a quintessential Karasu text which is highly challenging to the reader. However, it was successfully translated by Aron Aji as The Garden of Departed Cats (2003) and received the 2004 National Translation Award from the American Literary Translation Association (ALTA). This study aims to examine the target and the source texts in order to discover what choices and strategies Aji made during the translation process.

Keywords: Aron Aji, Bilge Karasu, literary translation, translation strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi was written by Bilge Karasu, one of the most eminent authors of contemporary Turkish literature. Aron Aji translated one of his well-known work, Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi into English entitled The Garden of Departed Cats and received national...
translation award by ALTA (American Literary Translators Association) in 2004. When we examine the translation product it is clear that the translator maintained the content and structure in general, but preferred to simplify the cultivated and complex language by means of omitting adjectives, dividing long sentences and freeing the target text from local sayings, obsolete words and neologisms. Thus, he adopts a more target-oriented approach and his translation strategy is closer to domestication strategy introduced by Lawrence Venuti where the translator translates a text by putting the target culture to the fore. Namely, the text is conformed to the needs of the culture that the text is translated into. The aim of this study is to analyse the structure, the language of both source and target texts. In other words, the Turkish text and the English translation.

1.1. The Source-text Author Bilge Karasu and Göçmuş Kediler Bahçesi

Karasu wrote about the problems of the individual and his/her dilemmas in daily life. The main themes of his works are death, fear, love, friendship, loneliness and passion. Many literary critics such as, Hasan Cemaleddin Gürpınar stated that Karasu was a “master of language” (1997: 72). He was meticulous while choosing the words that he used in his works and sensitive towards pure Turkish. His language was cultivated and refined. He also put great emphasis on the style of his works. Karasu created a symbolic language abound with connotations. He preferred to use a complicated, distorted syntax.

Karasu’s third work Göçmuş Kediler Bahçesi was first published by Milliyet Publishing in 1979. It consists of thirteen short stories that have common themes. The short story, “Göçmuş Kediler Bahçesi”, which shares its title with the title of the story book is divided into some sections and located between the other short stories of the book. Karasu defines his stories as fairy tales since that genre gives the author more freedom. Therefore; he can blur the realm of reality and fantasy. Allowing him a larger ground of imagery, tales suit “Karasu’s works (that are) always metaphorical [...] a tendency belongs to a Turkish tradition” (Paker 2004: 9).

One of the most dominant themes that leave its mark on the stories is “love”. Karasu mainly deals with “the ethics of love” in these stories (Özgüven 2003: 10) (translation mine). The love in question is not a soft and compassionate one; it is rather destructive, stinging and embedded with passion. That love does “not make the lovers walk on the air” (Arslantunalı 2000: 50) (translation mine). On the contrary; it “harasses the couples who are in search of balance” (ibid). A love is at the issue that includes “biting”, “eating” and “devouring”. In “Avından El Alan” (The Prey), the relationship between the fisherman and the fish or in “Bir Ortaçağ Masalı (A Medieval Monk), the relationship between the monk and its hairy creature are all exemplary cases for that kind of love.

Most of these love relationships ultimately experience death. For instance; the fish swallows the fisherman’s arm and unites with its lover and causes him to die in the end. The narrator of “The Garden of Departed Cats” spurts wrongly because of his passion towards one of the players of the opposite team and finally dies. All these cases accommodate violence and passion. Actually, love and passion are hand in hand in all stories and turn into the same thing. The relationship of master and his apprentice is resembled to the relationship of mother and son and it is so powerful and passionate that the desire of the apprentice proving his skills to his master causes him to die.
As mentioned above, love and passion cause the characters to die. None of the protagonists of the stories can escape from death. Nevertheless, their wish might be to reach that sacred end. In the stories like “Dehlize Giden Adam” (The Man Walking in the Tunnel), “Bir Başka Tepe” (Another Peak), “Geceden Geçeye Arabayı Kaçran Adam” (The Man Who Misses His Ride, Night After Night), “Usta Beni Öldürsen E!” (Kill Me, Master!) in which the passion is expressed by means of climbing to a peak, reaching the sea or loving someone, the protagonists live for one thing and die for it.

The most remarkable symbol which represents death is the sea in The Garden of Departed Cats. In the stories such as “İncitme Beni” (Hurt Me Not), “Bizim Denizimiz” (Our Sea), “Avıdan El Alan” (The Prey), the sea is the life-giver like a mother’s womb, it is long-awaited, yet it destructs, suffocates and annihilates the characters.

2. COMPARATIVE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

2.1 Aron Aji’s Translation Choices in terms of Themes and Narrative Technique

Aji is a passionate reader of Karasu. He even states that the ultimate implied reader in his mind for his translations is Karasu himself. In his essay, “Dilde Özgürlük: Bilge Karasu’nun Eserlerinde Yenilikçi Atılımlar” (2013: 15-24) he underlines his admiration for Karasu as a writer. Aji translates the work by adopting a more source oriented approach in terms of themes and content. He does not prefer to be flexible and play with content in an artistic way. Aji’s translation maintains all the themes discussed above.

Telescopic stories in Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi attract attention regarding the narrative technique of the source-text. Sometimes a story is told in another story and such stories have common themes and nourish each other. For instance; In “Avıdan El Alan” (The Prey), both the story of fisherman—the fish and the Bey—the leopard are told. Both themes are the same. However; they are not narrated respectively but in a telescopic way, sometimes one line of a story is followed by the other. Karasu adopts this technique from time to time which makes the reading process even harder for the reader.

Bey, karacanın ardından uçuyordu mahmuzlayıp durduğu
Tekboynuz, kazoğlan kızlara düşkün. Koşar, koşar, onların
atın sırtında. At kanatlarını germiş, gölgesini karacanın üzerine
kucağına atar kendini, yatar: Herkesin bildiği bir şey bu. Tek-
değdirdi değişirecek. Karaca birden taş gibi durdu kaldı.
[...] (2008:25)

The Bey rode his horse like a flash of light, chasing the

The unicorn is fond of virgins. The fabled creature runs and
deer. The horse spread its wings, its shadow almost touch-
throws himself into her embrace, laying its head on her lap:
ing the deer. The prey stopped suddenly, as if turned to

*Everybody knows this. And the only way to capture a unicorn*

stone. [...] (2003: 18)

As seen above, Aji prefers to preserve the telescopic story technique and italise the unicorn story just as the source text. Thus, the target text adopts a source-oriented approach in terms of themes and narrative technique. Significant omissions or additions to the target text were not applied to the text, dramatic differences in the narrative technique or the main themes do not exist between the two texts.

2.2. Aron Aji’s Translation Choices in terms of Language

“What kind of language does Bilge Karasu have?” asks Nurdan Gürbilek (1997: 193) (translation mine). It is a “cultivated” language which is “desired to be perfect” (ibid). Thus; the writer worked on it meticulously like a sculpture and aimed to produce a language which “keeps itself away from the reader” (1997: 194). To construct such a language Karasu adopted distinctive syntactical and lexical features.

2.2.1 Syntax

Syntax is an indispensable part of Karasu’s style. His long and complex sentence structures and inversions are striking. That sort of syntax does not present the reader a fluent and easily understandable text. The reader should decode the long and loaded wording. In addition to this, inversions contribute to the literary flavour of the text:

i. Bir çocuk var, kumla boyunca koşan (2008: 20).

ii. Kendini salında görüyor ansızın balıkçı (2008: 27).

iii. Aşağıda, şimdi, ölümün kayası yavaş yavaş aralanmaktadır kendisine doğru süzülüp gelen balıkçıyı karşılamak için (2008: 28).

The excerpts above are taken from “Avından El Alan” (The Prey). The common feature of these sentences is that they are inverted. For sure, inversions literalize the narration and Turkish is highly convenient for such usage. Hence; Karasu often benefits from inverted sentences.

1. A boy is running the length of a sandy shore (2003: 12)

2. Suddenly he sees himself in his boat (2003: 20)

3. Below, the rock slowly opens to receive the fisherman who arrives in surrender (2003: 21).

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1 The examples in this section are taken from the stories, “Avından El Alan” (The Prey) and “Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi” (The Garden of Departed Cats).
When the target and source sentences compared and contrasted it is seen that the target text does not embody inversions. It is a fact that inverted sentences are not frequently used in English, however; if the purpose is to reflect the features of Karasu’s literature in the target cultures, it will be wise to increase the number of inversions.

To illustrate long and complex sentence structures, the example below can be examined:

Bense, koparma defterimden karalama defterime aktarılacak sekiz tümçenin yazılı olduğu kağıtları defterden koparıp çanta almış, ola olsun diye “Göçmüşler Bahçesinde Bir Yazılık Sevi” sözçüklerinin alt alta sıralamış, kağıdı masanın üzerine bırakmasa, anlamadığı bir dildeki bu yazıyı önce sökme ugraşmış, sonra “Bayım, bayım! diye seslendikten sonra merakına kapılmış, sonunda kağıtla birlikte defterin koçanını, kapaklarını tortup edip tablaya bırakmışım (2008: 10).

The sentence above is taken from the story, “Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi” (The Garden of Departed Cats). This paragraph long quotation is actually a single sentence which consists of subordinate clauses. Its translation is below:

I tore off the notebook pages that had the eight sentences I would later transfer to my draft book. I put those pages in my pocket and on the remaining page, I jotted down, just for the sake of jotting, the words, “In The Garden of the Departed, A Summer Romance,” and I thought of leaving the page on the table, wondering whether the waiter would notice it and try to decode this scribbling in a strange language, whether he would run after me, calling me. Instead, I crumpled the page and pitched it in the ashtray (2003: 3).

The paragraph above includes three sentences. The translator, most probably, divided the sentence in order to provide readability. He preferred not to translate some phrases like “alt alta” (one under the other) “Bayım, bayım!” (Sir, Sir!). Thus, he shortened the sentences (translation mine).

A similar example follows:

Gitgide soğuyan yüzey suları damar damar, oluk oluk akarlar bularak balık corumlarının çekildiği kuytulara sıçråca (2008: 17).

The icy currents will flow into underwater shelters where school of fish retreat (2003: 9).

The source sentence taken from “Avından El Alan” (The Prey) is followed by its translation. When they are compared it is seen that the target sentence is shorter. Reduplications like “damar damar”, “oluk oluk” were not translated.

The following example from “Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi” (The Garden of Departed Cats):

Kendilerine göre güney, bu kente göre gene de pek kuzeyde kalan o zengin derebeyinin topraklarını iyice kuşatıklarında, dört yönden salgına girişip ürünler yağmaladılar, çekildiler (2008: 121).
They laid siege to the territories of the wealthy overlord. When the time was right, they attacked from four directions, pillaged the land, and retreated (2003: 133).

The target sentence excludes “Kendilerine göre güney, bu kente göre gene de pek kuzeyde kalan” and “iyice”. Consequently, Aji aims a simpler syntax.

The analysis suggests that the translator prefers a syntax that will not exhaust the reader. A simpler, understandable, fluent translation is the objective for the English audience. Thus, unlike his attitude towards the content and the structure, Aji prefers a target oriented approach while translating the syntax and aims less number of descriptions which makes the English text less elevated and poetic.

2.2.2 Lexicon

Undoubtedly, one of the elements that make Bilge Karasu’s style distinctive is his lexicon. As Nurdan Gürbilek states Karasu often prefers a forgotten vocabulary or that is not in daily usage (1998: 10). In contrast to many other Turkish authors, Karasu gets benefit from a larger vocabulary. His adopts pure Turkish movement, and also enriches his narrative by adding local sayings of Anatolia to his vocabulary. In addition; he creates neologisms which are often compound words that make sense easily.

His lexical choices relating to pure Turkish are “İlenç,” (p 16) “özek,” (p 29) “dirim,” (p 31), “alışka,” (p 32) “uzanır,” (p 34) “saklanan,” (p 41) “bıni,” (p 47) “çevren,” (p 48) “yontu,” (p 123) “sürem,” (p 132) “erinç,” (p 138), “susku,” (p 143) “utku” (p 149).

In the target text, they are translated as (respectively) “Curse,” (p. 8) “center,” (p. 25) “life,” (p. 25) “habit,” (p. 27) “bazaar,” (p. 29) “elusive,” (p. 37) “steed,” (p. 44) “horizon,” (p. 46) “drift,” (p. 138) “ecosystem,” (p. 147) “satisfaction,” (p. 153) “silence,” (p. 158) “victory” (p. 164). The lexical choices in the target product are Standard English. However; using pure Turkish words is an inseparable part of Karasu’s style.

The local sayings and outdated words: “koyak,” (p. 9) “soğukluk,” (p. 10) “zeyreklik,” (p. 16) “akak,” (p. 17) “corum,” (p. 17) “torlak,” (p. 18) “başkumak,” (p. 18) “muştulama,” (p. 19) “kumla” (p. 20) “gezmen,” (p. 29) “değırmı,” (p. 29) “kavkı,” (p. 31) “kuşatmak,” (p. 32) “ırganmak,” (p. 35) “1muzganmak,” (p. 37) “çınak,” (p. 47) “kurtulmalık,” (p. 55) “elgin,” (p. 59) “keme,” (p. 60) “incitmebeni,” (p. 75) “sısçaşmak,” (p. 101) “yınışık,” (p. 101) “şimmek,” (p. 126).

Respectively, Aji translated those words as “valley,” (p. 1) “food,” (p. 2) “obvious,” (p. 8) “shelter,” (p. 9) “school of fish,” (p. 9) “naive,” (p. 10) (not translated directly), “portent,” (p. 11) “shore,” (p. 12) “tourist,” (p. 23) (not translated directly), “shell,” (p. 25) “stir,” (p. 27) “sway,” (p. 30) “drowsy,” (p. 32) “claw,” (p. 44) “ransom,“ (p. 54) “displaced,” (p. 59) “rat,” (p. 60) “cancer,” (p. 78) “moist,” (p. 108) “slippery,” (p. 108) “bath,” (p. 134). Thus; local sayings and outdated words turn into standard English in Aji’s translation.

Finally, some of the neologisms Karasu used in Göçmüş Kediler Bahçesi are “ölümdirım,” (p. 78) “kardeşkovan,” (p. 112) “oğultutmaç,” (p. 112). Aji translated these neologisms as “Life-and-death,” (p. 81) “jealous brother,” (p. 122) “father who rejects his sons,” (p. 122). The translator often concentrates on conveying the semantic meaning of neologisms. Instead of creating new neologisms in English, he prefers to translate the source text with explanatory words. Consequently; regarding lexicon, Aji uses standard English and has a tendency to prefer the lexicon that simplifies the narrative.
CONCLUSION

Aji adopted a source-oriented approach in translating the content but in terms of language he adopts an opposite approach. This may partly stem from the differences between Turkish and English languages. However, it is also a fact that many American publishers prefer simpler, more understandable language where the reader as consumer can read easily. Lawrence Venuti discusses these subjects in his work entitled Invisibility of the translator and other scholars such as Gayatri C. Spivak also makes references to this subject where the source text end up losing its peculiarities. Apparently, Aji could not run away with this reality either and had to shorten sentences, omitted many descriptions and used standard English as much as possible which seems like he translated the text in a more domesticated, target oriented way. Yet, there is no right or wrong way of translation but there are preferences and the realities of the publishing industry and thanks to Aji’s translation World literature gained an interesting, meticulous literary piece from Turkish literature.

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