

Opera Translations in Light of Skopos Theory

"Don Giovanni" as a Test Case

Ada Lewinski

Abstract

This paper aims to study opera translations, using the opera **Don Giovanni** by Mozart as a case study. The analysis in this paper is grounded in the Skopos Theory - a functional approach to translation studies, developed by Hans Vermeer, Christiane Nord and others. In this approach, the focus of the study is the purpose of the translations ("Skopos" - purpose in ancient Greek.) Through juxtaposing various skopoi with different translation characteristics, the paper attempts to shed light on the reciprocal relationships between these aspects.

No previous studies proposing a comprehensive method for analyzing opera translations in light of Skopos Theory were found. Also, opera, being a multifaceted work of art, presents translators with many challenges, resulting in there being a large array of opera translations' characteristics. Therefore, I have devised a new methodological structure for analyzing translations of opera. The method includes specifying and classifying the inspection tools (skopoi and characteristics and their different aspects), and creating auxiliary tables for gathering data. The methodology, as well as the process of compiling the lists of skopoi and characteristics, were initially based on previous studies; data obtained in the Bar-Ilan university course "Process and Product in the Translation of Demanding Genres: Poetry, Drama and Opera" (taught by Dr. Hannah Amit-Kochavi in 2010); a preliminary examination of

the translations, and my own acquaintance with the world of opera. As the study developed, the methodological structure became more elaborate and intricate, the lists expanded and changed according to the findings. Through this process, the methodological structure has become a significant part of the paper and even a purpose in itself, which may be considered a possible contribution to translation studies, and may hopefully serve future researchers in the field of musical and opera translation studies.

This paper proposes utilizing the concept of Skopos for analyzing translations, by breaking it into two distinct, yet complementary aspects, Objective and Interface. The objective describes the purpose for which the translation was intended, and/or the translation's actual use. The Interface with the target audience is determined prior to translating and it influences the characteristics of the final product. The process of compiling the list of objectives was as described above and it expanded following some statements of translators regarding objectives, that were found in further examination. The objectives studied in this paper are "learning," "teaching," "following" and "performing." The list of interfaces, compiled through the same process as described above, includes: Print on paper, perceived by sight; Recorded performance, perceived by hearing; Broadcast, which can be perceived by both sight and hearing; Text on the internet, perceived by sight; Captions (sub/super-titles), perceived by sight; Live performance in the target language, perceived by both sight and hearing. The translation characteristics were divided into two groups.

Translational Solutions, which focus on the translator's choices regarding style and the rendering of various characteristics on one hand. Para-Textual means on the other hand, which focus on aspects that are external to the text: Layout; Graphic marking of textual repetitions and of simultaneous singing (duets and ensembles); the existence

(or absence) of Para-textual items such as footnotes, and their implications. The paper also studies the ways in which the poetic, musical and theatrical properties of opera, which reflect its multifaceted nature, were rendered.

Reciprocal relationships between skopoi and characteristics were studied by juxtaposing the data collected in the auxiliary tables. In some cases tendencies, trends and correlations have been found. As a result of the research, I have been able to draw an imaginary axis that reflects the extent to which the studied translations cope with translational challenges, and the extent to which the different characteristics are rendered. On this axis, I could place the various objectives. On one end of the imaginary axis, the "learning" objective is placed. In most cases (except for one translation which was also attributed to all other objectives in addition to "learning"), the translational solutions selected in cases attributed to "learning" are not particularly demanding (prose, for example, which is less demanding than poetry); not much of the characteristics are transferred; and translation units tend to be small. At the center of the axis, I have placed the Teaching and Following Objectives. These objectives present a large array of translational solutions and para-textual means, and regarding the extent of characteristics rendering into the translations, mixed trends have been observed. On the opposite side of the axis, I have placed the objective of "performing." This objective is the most demanding one due to the resources required for taking on the challenges of this kind of translation. Also, in cases where translations are attributed to the "performing" objective and their interface is in a score of notes (it can be assumed that the same would apply to live performance in the target language as well), full transfer of all the various characteristics and facets has been observed.

This paper may contribute to translation studies, simply by drawing attention to the field of opera translations, and by helping to fill a void that exists in the research of this field. The paper proposes a new way of utilizing the notion of skopos by breaking it into two aspects that are distinct yet complementary - objectives and interfaces. These findings may also help translations' producers reach wise translational decisions based on a translation project's designated skopos, or choose the most appropriate among existing translations according to the intended skopos including objectives and interfaces. Finally, the methodology devised and developed for the purposes of this study may contribute to translation studies in general and to the field of opera and musical translation in particular.