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*Der Kuntsnmakher fun Lublin*: Coping with Voids in a Collaborative Self-Translation from Yiddish to English and Hebrew

MA thesis

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**Abstract**

The present is a research on collaborative self-translation, namely the phenomenon by which a translation is rendered jointly by the author of the original work and one or more translators.

The case study, *Der Kuntsnmakher fun Lublin* (1959), is a Yiddish novel by Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902-1991). Throughout the present thesis, three translations of this work – one in English and two in Hebrew – will be analyzed. Furthermore, strategies endorsed to cope with voids, that is, words and collocations found in the Yiddish original that have no lexical equivalencies in either English or Hebrew, are traced and compared across all three translated versions.

The English translation – *The Magician of Lublin* (1960) – is the product of a joint effort by Isaac Bashevis Singer himself and two additional translators, Joseph Singer and Elaine Gottlieb. Conversely, the two Hebrew translations – *Oseh Haniflaot MiLublin* (Karuh, 1970) and *HaKosem MiLublin* (Rubinstein, 2008) – were written without any assistance from the original author. The ultimate solutions chosen by all translators to cope with voids are studied whilst describing their differences, which are often ascribable to the norms and conventions present at the time and place where each of the three versions was published.

In order to classify voids in a systematic fashion, the present work relies on a taxonomy proposed by Elda Weizman (2010) in which voids are divided up into three main categories, following Saussure’s (1960) theory of the three components of the linguistic sign, namely the “signifier”, “signified” and “signification”. Hence, the main corpus of this work is comprised of three chapters: “Voids in the Realm of the Signifier”, “Voids in the Realm of the Signified” and “Voids in the Realm of Signification”. Aside from these three categories, Yiddish figurative set phrases that have no equivalent in either Hebrew of English are also analyzed in a separate chapter – “Idiomatic Voids”.

Another taxonomy used for the present work is that of Ivir (2003) on the strategies used by translators to cope with cultural voids. Solutions chosen by the Hebrew and English translators will thus be classified according to one of the seven categories proposed by

Ivir – borrowing, defining the elements of culture, literal translation, substitution, lexical creation, omission and addition of cultural information.

Findings from this analysis show that the translators of the English version greatly followed a norm by which they created an easily readable text that, for the most part, does not expose its readership to cultural elements they might not be familiar with. Moreover, a prominent aspect of this version is the endeavor to disguise any hostility harbored by the Jewish characters of the Yiddish original to the Christian faith and its believers so as not to potentially offend a broader American readership. On the other hand, many similarities were observed in relation to the registers of both the Yiddish and the English version, as characters use idiomatic speech and common contracted forms in their respective languages.

Karuh’s version is marked by an elevation in register. Its characters use high-register expressions which are not commonplace in quotidian Hebrew. Likewise, idiomatic Yiddish colocations are often translated using non-idiomatic language. These features are characteristic of publications of the time – a tendency to elevate the register of the original has prevailed in literal translations in Hebrew till, at least, the 1960’s (Weissbrod, 1992). Vestiges of this norm are also present in Rubinstein’s translation, written decades later than Karuh’s. Albeit his literary style challenges the average Hebrew reader (in accordance with the dominant norms of his time), Karuh’s endeavor to create a fluent version is nonetheless observable, insofar as he avoided strategies such as definitions, additions of cultural information and lexical creation, which often disrupt the flow of the reading.

One of the most salient aspects of Rubinstein’s version is her greater attempt to convey the Yiddish culture portrayed in *Der Kuntsnmakher fun Lublin*, as well as its literary richness, when compared to strategies employed in the other two translations. Rubinstein’s version has many footnotes whose main aim is to explain the reasons for the different phraseologies she used, or for the linguistic or cultural element described in the original. Many attempts to imitate colloquial speech used by the characters of the original, as well as alliterations and rhymes of its Yiddish idioms, are found in Rubinstein’s translation.

Several instances were identified wherein the Hebrew translators relied on the English translation, specifically, when unique elements of the Jewish culture of Eastern European are described in the original. This common trait points to the possibility that Hebrew translators related to the English version as a guide to cope with voids found in the Yiddish original. The rationale behind this assumption is that, as stated before, the English translators adapted their version to a wider readership whose members are not only Jewish. Therefore, it is possible that the solutions found in the English translation seemed appropriate to the Hebrew translators as well, inasmuch as their translations were written for a Jewish public who is familiar with most of the cultural elements portrayed in *Der Kuntsnmakher fun Lublin*, whereas only a small portion of them, namely those idiosyncratic of Eastern European Jewry, are unknown to them. These specific elements make up a considerable part of the incidents in which the Hebrew translators relied on *The Magician of Lublin*.

The reliance of the Hebrew translators on the English version is telling of the authenticity ascribed to both *Der Kuntsnmakher fun Lublin* and *The Magician of Lublin*, albeit the writing of the latter was a joint effort by the author and two translators. Collaborative self - translations are widespread amongst writers who write in minority languages. In order to attain fame and prestige, these writers often decide to translate their work into a hegemonic language. Some authors see in their participation throughout the translating process a pivotal component, as they want to endow the translated version with a seal of authenticity. Nevertheless, they often seek help from people with a good command in the end language. In some cases, collaborative self-translations become the famous and ultimate version; moreover, the translating process is often used as a means to edit and refine the original (Manterola Agirrezabalaga, 2017).

It appears that the Hebrew translators of *Der Kuntsnmakher fun Lublin* ascribed some level of authenticity and originality to *The Magician of Lublin* as well. To be sure, Karuh’s reliance is not confined to the use of strategies found in the English version for voids; he also translated additional information on the plot which is only found in *The Magician of Lublin* version, not in the Yiddish original.

We presume that, had Singer himself not contributed to the writing of the English version, the Hebrew translators would have not relied on it. In other words, albeit the Hebrew translators related to their knowledge of Yiddish, for the most part, as an advantage (i.e. contrary to translations of other languages, which are renderings of *The Magician of Lublin*, not *Der Kuntsnmakher fun Lublin*), they did ascribe some authenticity to *The Magician of Lublin* and used it as a reference to cope with voids and add information to the plot. We can therefore surmise that, had the English version been written only by Elaine Gottlieb and Joseph Singer, Karuh and Rubinstein would have not deemed it a suitable source for their Hebrew renderings.