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An "East" and "West" Translation of Two Short Stories by Nadine Gordimer: Text and Context

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[illegible] with dissertation on [illegible].

A translation research project submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Translation.

Johannesburg, November 1993

Abstract

This research project focuses on an analysis of two of Nadine Gordimer's short stories and their East and West German translation. The aim is a descriptive analysis within the framework of Descriptive Translation Studies, supplemented by language and literary theories. Lambert and van Gorp's *Synthetic Scheme for Translation Description* serves as a basic methodological tool that is supplemented by Fairclough's critical language study and discourse analysis. The focus of the analysis is the translational shifts and solutions with regard to the presentation of South African society, the social and political structures, as well as the depiction of people and their interrelationship within that society as portrayed in the respective short stories. These shifts are continuously contextualized within the broader interlingual and extralingual framework, taking into account the role of the reader as text producer.

Declaration

I declare that this research is my own, unaided work.

It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Translation in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



Annette Perabo

The 15 day of DECEMBER 1993.

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Abbreviations used

DTS	-	Descriptive Translation Studies
MR's	-	Members' Resources
SA1.1-1.3	-	textual samples from "The Smell of Death and Flowers" (English text)
SA2.1-2.3	-	textual samples from "Six Feet of the Country" (English text)
W1.1-1.3	-	textual samples from "Ein Hauch von Tod und Blumen (West German text)
W2.1-2.3	-	textual samples from "Sechs Fuß Erde" (West German text)
E1.1-1.3	-	textual samples from "Der Geruch von Tod und Blumen" (East German text)
E2.1-2.3	-	textual samples from "Sechs Fuß Erde" (East German text)
W text	-	West German text
E text	-	East German text
SA text	-	English text

Introduction

> *The originality of the foreign text is ... compromised by the post-structuralist concept of textuality. Neither the foreign text nor the translation is an original semantic unity; both are derivative and heterogeneous, consisting of diverse linguistic and cultural materials which destabilize the work of signification, making meaning plural and differential, exceeding and possibly conflicting with the intentions of the foreign writer and translator ...*
>
> (Venuti 1992:7)

Although Nadine Gordimer is one of the better known South African writers and her work has been translated extensively, her acclaim as writer was not the motive for the choice of author for this study. Extensive research done in South Africa as well as abroad has shown that Nadine Gordimer appears to be the only South African writer whose work has been translated independently in both former German states, all other works of South African writers published in former East Germany are licensed translations from West Germany. Apart from the difficulties experienced in obtaining information on translation as well as publishing strategies and the actual East German text which has been out of print, a choice had to be made with regard to a "suitable" theoretical framework, a methodology that would have to incorporate recent trends in translation studies and literary criticism as well as providing practical tools for the actual text analysis.

No text or metatext provides an intrinsic logic for the reader or critic, meaning is constructed (and can hence always be deconstructed) by the reader. My reading of the theoretical works, indeed the very choice of my framework is open to debate and does not claim to have any absolute truths. Yet within the theoretical framework as set out and applied in subsequent chapters, it is hoped that some valid results have been obtained. The aim of this study is a comparative yet descriptive analysis of East and West German translations of two of Nadine Gordimer's short stories with the focus on

the representation of South African society, the social and political structures as well as the depiction of people and their interrelationship within that society. Lambert and van Gorp's 'Synthetic Scheme for Translation Description' (Lambert & van Gorp in Hermans 1985) provides a basis for the structure of the analysis, although their proposed sequence of the actual scheme is altered. 'Preliminary data' and 'Synthetic context' is synthesised into one chapter (chapter 1) which precedes the macro- and micro-analysis (chapter 2 and 3). Lambert and van Gorp's model only serves as a guideline to the theoretical framework. Their notions on translational norms and equivalence have not been adopted as the number of texts of the present analysis is too small in order to infer any valid comments on translational strategies regarding translations published in the two former states[1]. However, in line with the most recent work published on translation theory (Venuti 1992, Bassnet & Lefevere 1990, Snell-Hornby 1988), the emphasis of the study is on the 'complex relations' rather than the 'binary relations' (Lambert & van Gorp in Hermans 1985:46) within translation criticism. The aim is to show the 'complex web of relationships' (Snell-Hornby 1988) between the lingual as well as extralingual elements of the three texts, without imposing an a priori hierarchy on the texts themselves[2]. This means that any notion of a 'tertium comparationis' (cf. Toury in Hermans 1985) as well as concepts such as 'acceptability' or 'adequacy' are rejected:

> such [terms] seem to exclude the possibility that a translated text could ever be both adequate to the original and acceptable in the target language, since + adequate translation will always be a - acceptable one.
>
> (Zlatera in Bassnett & Lefevere 1990:29)

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[1] Both Prof. Neubert (Universität Leipzig) and Mr. Conrad (director of Fischer Verlag) have indicated that to their knowledge no study has been done on East and West German translations of English texts.

[2] Hence a strategy for the analysis was adopted whereby texts are not referred to as "original" and "translation" or even "source" and "target text" but simply by a numerical system (cf. list of abbreviations).

Translation and the act of translating have always been marginalized by an 'essentially romantic conception of authorship' (Venuti 1992:3); "originals" are regarded as superior to translations which are purely mimetic and non-artistic in nature and are liable to become dated, whereas the "original" never dates. This notion of the "original" as a form of self-expression by the author versus the translation as a copy of a copy is being compromised by the post-structuralist concept of textuality. Neither the "original" nor the translation are independent semantic units, both are produced (by the author as well as by the reader) in a larger linguistic and extralinguistic context that is unstable and ever-changing. Translation studies have undergone a development from the structuralist notion of the word as linguistic unit (the so-called prescriptive school of translation studies was greatly influenced by highly idealistic models for machine translations) to regarding the text as unit. Recent trends in translation studies have moved beyond the constraints of the text to the corpus or system of texts and extralingual factors. This 'cultural turn' (Bassnett & Lefevere 1990:2) within translation studies has facilitated a constructive, eclectic approach for the analysis of translations that can be summarised as follows: 1. an orientation towards cultural rather than linguistic transfer, 2. translation not as process of transcoding but as an act of communication, 3. orientation towards the function of the translated text, 4. the text as integral part of the world and not as an isolated phenomenon (Snell- Hornby in Bassnett & Lefevere 1990:81).

The descriptive school of translation studies as well as cultural studies (Talgeri 1988, Snell-Hornby 1988) are helpful for clarifying the position and status of the texts and the critic. They do not, however, provide a practical tool for a descriptive text analysis. Bell (1991), Doctor (1988) as well as Fairclough (1989) (cf. chapter 2 and 3) base their work on text analysis or discourse analysis which is able to incorporate linguistic as well as extralinguistic realities of the texts. Discourse analysis is an ideal tool for the analysis of language in context, considering the author and the reader as text producer

in their larger contexts, yet being specific enough to avoid intuitive and generalised assumptions and interpretations.

As emphasised throughout this study, a direct and uncritical comparison between the two "Germanies" is restrictive and from a philological point frequently not tenable (cf. chapter 1). However, some generalisations were inevitable in order to have a basis for the comparative study. Cultural theories such as supported by Talgeri (1988) or Snell-Hornby (1988) were not always applicable to the present study, as the examples cited are often extreme cases (such as a translation of Indian and Chinese poetry into English) and the notion of "culture" is frequently treated uncritically. With regard to the German translations, the two respective language communities have to a great extent shared the same language, history and culture yet were exposed to diametrically opposed ideologies and economic realities. To regard them as two distinct "cultures" would be as wrong as regarding them as sharing the same extralingual background.

The analysis of Nadine Gordimer's short stories and the East and West German translation thus constitutes an eclectic approach that is based on Lambert and van Gorp's 'scheme' and notions of recent developments within DTS as well as on theories regarding discourse, language and power. The theoretical framework used for the analysis is discussed and subsequently applied in chapter 2 and further developed in chapter 3.