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Zulu literature in the global book market: the English translation of Inkinsela YaseMgungundlovu

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Abstract

This research report investigates the translation of the Zulu novel *Inkinsela YaseMgungundlovu* (1961) by Sbusiso Nyembezi into English as *The Rich Man of Pietermaritzburg* (2008) translated by Sandile Ngidi. The study is based on the notion of translation norms. Norms govern both the acceptance of literary texts into literary systems (initial norms) and the form a translation assumes (operational and textual norms) (Toury 1978/2004, Toury 1995). The study has two foci: the first, given the publication of the translation by a British publisher, is an examination of the reception of the English translation within the framework of postcolonial book history based on debates about the marketing of cultural products from the Global South by metropolitan audiences (Huggan 2001, Brouillette 2007); the second is a descriptive comparative analysis of the source-text and the target-text. The first focus is therefore concerned with initial norms while the second is concerned with operational and textual norms. The study is situated within the theoretical paradigm of Polysystem theory which argues that when literatures from less influential languages are translated into more powerful languages they tend to adopt the prevailing norms of those hegemonic literary systems (Even-Zohar 1990). This study tests this hypothesis by examining the approach adopted by Ngidi when translating *Inkinsela YaseMgungundlovu*. Broadly speaking, a literary translations is often considered to be either a foreignization or domestication (Venuti 1998/2008). A domesticized translation subscribes to target-language norms while a foreignized translation deliberately emphasizes the foreign provenance of a text by resisting the tendency to translate a text by subscribing to domestic norms. Foreignization is not to be confused with 'exoticization'. Foreignization refers to an ethical stance rejecting the imposition of hegemonic target-culture norms whereas 'exoticization' refers to the ethnocentric aestheticization of otherness. The presentation and reception of the novel by metropolitan critics is subject to an examination along these lines to ascertain the norms surrounding this text's recent translation and inclusion in the dominant literary system and the norms that govern reading practices surrounding it. The textual analysis element of this study examines the translation of *Inkinsela YaseMgunundlovu*, situating the approach taken by the translator within the poles of domestication and foreignization. These two foci are then be synthesized to provide a holistic account of place occupied by *The Rich Man of Pietermaritzburg* in the receiving system.