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A Critical Review of the Role of Translator's Critical Reading and Pragmatic Function of "Preface" as a Paratextual Element vis-a-vis the Readers of the Translated Text

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Abstract

This research focuses on the impact of translator's "critical reading" (Baker, 2010) on the text which is called translator's preface (as a paratextual element). Translators who have translated the same text may not have the same interpretation for the same work. For example, one feature of a work would seem important for one translator but not so for the other. According to Genette (1997) it is possible to access these differences by studying the prefaces of the

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translators. He believes that the main role of the preface is to explain for the reader why and how to read the translated book. When interpretation of a work is different among translators it is not surprising that their reason for translating a book and their way of persuading readers to read their translation would be different from each other.

The importance of this research article lies in the fact that it will show how reading and interpretation of translators are reflected in their prefaces and how the prefaces unwittingly manipulate our understanding of that work. At the end, as a case study, prefaces of two translations of a Latin American novel are analyzed to see how translators, as critical readers, might have different interpretations of a novel and how these are reflected in their prefaces.

Key words: critical reading, pragmatic function, paratextual element, preface.

1. Introduction

1.1 Translators as Critical Readers

Venuti (as cited in Baker, 2010: 65), in his essay *Translation as Cultural Politics: Regimes of Domestication in English*, refers to *violence* of translation. He believes that "translation is inherently violent because it necessarily involves reconstituting the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist it in the target language". Here Venuti refers to different social, political and other backgrounds of translators and how their implications are reflected in different strategies and modes of translation used by them. But translation would be more violent than it normally is when there are different personal values and beliefs and different ideology among the translators of the same work. Consequently there would be different reasons for translating a work which result in the use of different strategies and modes of translation.

According to Baker (2010: 195):

“what is needed is a model of translated narrative which accounts for the way in which the Translator's voice insinuates itself into the discourses and adjusts to the displacement which translation brings about. The model needs to incorporate the Translator as constantly co-

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producing the discourse, shadowing, mimicking and, as it were, counterfeiting the narrator's words, but occasionally caught in the text's disparities and interstices, and *paratextually* emerging into the open as a separate discursive presence.”

Hermans (as cited in Baker, 2010: 195- 212) in his essay *The Translator's Voice in Translated Narrative*, declares that translators and interpreters do not necessarily "function as institutional gatekeepers, echoing and strengthening the 'voice of the authority' " (p.195). He believes that translators have a voice "in their own right" (ibid). According to Hermans, existing narratological models have overlooked the critical presence of the translator. He makes a guess that the reason for this would lie in the fact that "the translator's voice often remains entirely hidden behind that of the Narrator and may be impossible to detect in some translated texts" (ibid).

There are situations in which translators resolve some "contradictions or fissures" through their intervention. This is called 'performative self-contradictions' that make the translator to " 'come out of the shadows and directly intervene in a text which, the reader had been led to believe, spoke with only one voice' " (ibid. 194). The first situation is where "the text's orientation towards an Implied Reader is directly at issue, as when it contains topical references and allusions that call on the translator to intervene by providing background information to ensure that communication can proceed smoothly" (ibid). The situation in which the text "is characterized by self-reflexiveness and self-referentiality, as when it exploits puns or polysemy, or when it addresses the translator directly" (ibid), is the second type. And the last type of situation is when there is 'contextual overdetermination'. "It means features or statements which create a credibility gap that readers can only resolve by reminding themselves of the fact that they are reading a translation" (ibid).

In her essay *Ideology and the Position of the Translator: In What Sense Is a Translator 'in Between'?* Tymoczko (as cited in Baker, 2010: 213- 228), introduces the concept of 'in betweenness'. She says: "the ideological aspects of a translation are inextricable from the 'place of enunciation' of the translator and that this place is not simply geographical but also temporal

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and ideological" (ibid. 213). According to her, the ideology of a translation is located in "the translated text and also in the voice and positioning of the translator and our understanding of this positioning has been influenced by the tendency to speak of translation itself as an in between space" (ibid).

Paratextual elements (especially, *preface*) are parts of those devices contributing to reflecting the voice of the translators. Next section is dedicated to this concept.

1.2 The Significant Role of Paratextual Elements

Paratexts are those devices found both within and outside a book. They help to mediate among books, authors, publishers and readers. Although some scholars have investigated the paratextual elements, it is claimed that Genette is the first who has presented "a global view of liminal mediations and the logic of their relation to the reading public" (Genette, 1967: xx).

Genette (1967) means by paratexts titles, forewords, epigraphs and publishers' jacket copy, etc. He claims that a paratext shows "how the special pragmatic status of paratextual declarations requires a carefully calibrated analysis of their illocutionary force" (Genette, 1997: xix). His theory works in a way to "challenge us to *read through* the conventions of the paratext to the discursive life of the book, which in turn enables the reading with renewed vigor of other books" (ibid).

Alvstad (as cited in Pym, 2012: 38- 67), in the essay: *Anthologizing Latin- American Literature: Swedish Translative Re-imaginings of Latin America 1954-1998 and Links to Travel Writing*, has investigated how Latin America and its literature is presented to the Swedish readership through covers, titles, prefaces and blurbs. This essay suggests that "the discourse of the blurbs and forewords throughout the whole period is reminiscent of travel writing, another genre that also typically produces re-imaginings of the area it explores" (ibid. 68). According to Alvstad this analysis shows the differences between different Latin American literary translation anthologies, "some of which are related to the time of the anthology's publication, while other

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characteristics seem to depend on the prefaces and values of the anthologists" (ibid).

Yuste Frias (2012) has used *paratranslation* and this concept was born with the purpose of "approaching and analysing the impact of the aesthetic, political, ideological, cultural and social manipulations at play in all the paratextual productions situated in and out of the margins of any translation" (p: 118).

This concept was proposed to: "Analyze the time and space needed to translate any paratext that surrounds, wraps, accompanies, extends, introduces and presents the translated text. All these has been put together with the aim of ensuring the translated text's existence, reception and consumption in the publishing world, either in book form or under any other format of digitalized publication (...)" (2012: 118).

This new term in Translation Studies is coined for the Translation and Paratranslation (T&P) research group at the University of Vigo and start-up of a homonymous MA degree programme at the same university.

By doing a detailed analysis on *orthotypographical image* of the title letters in the covers of two children's books as a key paratextual element in the transmission of meaning in translation, Yuste Frias (2012) has described the way in which the paratextual element was disregarded by one of the publications' imaginarium. He concludes that there is "a pressing need for a permanent dialogue between translators and editors to ensure that no translation is published without its corresponding paratranslation" (2012: 117).

According to interpretation of Watts (2000) of the theory of Genette, paratexts have primary and secondary functions. "The primary function of pratexts in all contexts is to attract readers, to draw them toward and into the book" (p:31). The secondary function of the paratext "... with works by a perceived *cultural Other* ... is one of cultural translation, especially for the metropolitan readership" (ibid). Watts (2000) investigated the role of paratextual elements in introducing the work of a French author to a country. In the last fifty years, this book has been

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printed many times, and each time had been in a new form and with different paratextual elements. Watts (2000) claims that the comparison of the first and the last form of this work shows that the social status of this work has been changed during the last fifty years. His aim of this study has been to find out if paratextual elements have had any role in the way of the work's reception. He found that paratextual elements are *cultural instruments* that make the understanding of cultural differences easy.

Genette (1997), in his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, classifies the paratextual elements according to their *substantial* feature into four categories: *textual*: elements such as titles, prefaces and interviews. *Iconic*: elements of illustrations, etc. *Material*: elements that are related to typographical types. *Factual*: elements that are related to age, sex, social and political status of author, the date of publication or prizes, etc. (1997: 5-7).

Regarding the status of paratextual elements, Genette says: "the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (1997: 1).

According to the *location*, paratextual elements are divided into two groups: *paratext= peritext+ epitext* (Genette, 1997: 5). Genette defines peritext as: "Within a book are such elements as the title or the preface and sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter titles or certain notes. I will give the name *peritext* to this first spatial category - certainly the more typical one" (ibid).

He also defines *epitext* as: "The distance elements are all those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communication (letters, diaries, and others)" (Ibid).

Paratextual elements have *pragmatic* functions and in different situations they have different roles and different interpretations (ibid. 8). One of the pragmatic features is *illocutionary force*. Genette describes *illocutionary force* as "Here again we are dealing with a

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gradation of states. A paratextual element can communicate a piece of sheer information - the name of the author, for example, or the date of publication. It can make known an intention, or an interpretation by the author and/ or the publisher: this is the chief function of most prefaces, and also of the genre indication on some covers or title pages ...” (Genette, 1997: 10).

In this research *preface*, locationally as a peritext and substantially as a textual paratext, is under focus. During a time or in different periods of time every *preface* can have different functions. According to such factors as type of *sender* and parameters of *place* and *time*, function of a paratext is determined (Genette, 1997: 196).

Kos (2008) has discussed that, in different historical and cultural situations of target society, how the study of changes and modifications of paratextual elements during a period, gives significant insights into the change of cultural context of a society. And also his study shows that by using paratextual strategies it is possible to reimage and rewrite a work.

By taking into consideration the three factors (*sender*, and parameters of *place* and *time*), Genette introduces six types of paratext: *the original authorial preface*, *the original authorial postface*, *the later authorial preface/postface*, *the delayed authorial preface or postface*, *the authentic allographic and actorial preface* and *fictional preface* (ibid). (For more information, please refer to Genette, 1997: 196).

The first type (*the original authorial preface*) is the focus of this research which deals with three aspects:

1. A preface is authorial, the author being the main and, strictly speaking, the only person interested in having the book read properly.

2. The preface from the first edition must be considered. A later preface in a subsequent edition runs the risk of being too late. A book that is in its first edition may be read improperly, or not read at all, and thus may have no other editions).

3. The preface is introductory and therefore has the function of monitoring, guiding this is

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why and this is *how* you should read this book (ibid. 197).

Croker (2011: 2) believes that because before the text is read, it is the preface and other paratextual elements that attract the attention of readers; so they have a significant role in influencing the readers.

So the original authorial preface has as its main function to ensure that the text is read and is read correctly and properly.

These objectives determine two groups of functions, one related to the *why* and the other to the *how*. This study is dedicated to the themes of the *why*.

The theory of Genette is generally designed for all kinds of works. In this research what is studied is a translated literary work; so the prefaces written by the translators to persuade readers to read the work which they found necessary and interesting to translate and to introduce to their nations.

Sometimes authors (and translators) try to persuade readers by making clear the importance of the work. So the themes of the *why* are focused upon in this study. Genette (1997: 199) identifies the subjects that would probably be useful for a society: *documentary usefulness, intellectual usefulness, moral usefulness, religious usefulness and social and political usefulness.*

When translators of literary works read critically a book for making decisions about translating it or not, one of the reasons that might encourage them to translate a work is certainly its subject or some subjective aspects that seem important or interesting to them. It is clear that their way of reading, the aspects that may attract their attention and their interpretation of the text depend on the understanding of the world in terms social, cultural, political, religious and other factors. Or, in other words, their personal and social experiences in life may help them to decide. By taking into consideration these facts, it is clear that *critical reading* (Baker, 2010) is the best answer to the question why themes of *why* in prefaces of different translators are usually

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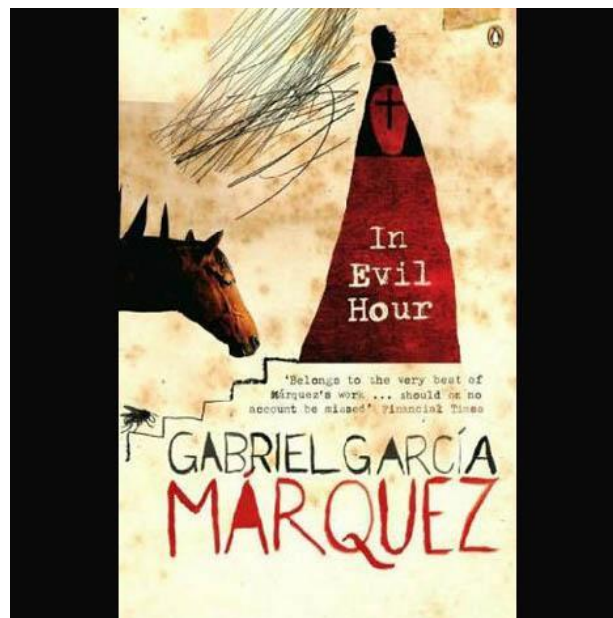
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different.

2. A Case Study of Two Translations of a Literary Latin American Work

As it is mentioned earlier, in this essay preface as *the original authorial textual peritext* is studied. Translations of two literary works by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a brilliant writer in Latin America, have been chosen. The reason for choosing this literature and this author is the novelty that challenged the translators for introducing it to their society. According to Swanson (2005): “The rise of the Latin American New Novel and the Boom of the 1960s (which brought to international attention writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Mario Vargas Llosa) represent, in literary-historical terms, the most significant developments ever in Latin American writing” (2005: 2).



Two translations of the novel *The Ominous Time*, also known as *In Evil Hour* (1961) were considered. These translations have a preface each by the translators. In 1983, this work is translated into Persian by Farahmand and in 2008 it was translated again into Persian by Parsai.

In prefaces with the themes of the why, describing the *importance of subject* is one of the

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ways used by translators to persuade readers *to get the book to read and read it properly*. Farahmand (1983) in the preface of *The Ominous Time* refers to *political usefulness* of the work and by adding the superlative adjective (*the most political work of Marquez*) to this description, strengthens this aspect of the novel. This translator has written a summary of the work's contents; clearly those contents that have purely political aspects are included in this summary. Another subject that is under the translator's focus is *documentary usefulness*. In his preface, after making reference to the political contents, Farahmand relates all of that to the political events happening in Argentina. In describing the *documentary usefulness*, Farahmand explains more about the social and political life of characters and real people and describes how their life is influenced by the affairs of the police and the government.

Intellectual usefulness is the last subject that the translator is used to describe the author's writing method. He describes Marquez's writing method using adjectives such as *witty words*.

In the preface of another translator, Parsai (2008) there are no traces of *political usefulness*. This may be the main difference that would make the reader's insights into the novel critically different. In this preface, the importance of the novel is summarized in its *documentary usefulness*. In other words, the translator argues how this novel is full of *banal* and routine events that in real life happen to us every day. Here there is another difference. Although in Farahmand's preface the *documentary usefulness* is related to real political and social life, in Parsai this usefulness is related to more personal events.

The last importance of the novel that is referred to by Parsai is *intellectual usefulness*. Concerning this feature, Parsai (2008) argues that Marquez has been the author who has given a new life to the novel writing and what is interesting in his writing method is his way of getting the readers understand different matters by combining them with exciting and surprising adventures but just in short phrases and sentences.

This short case study makes clear how different the minds of the translators would be about the importance of a novel. By scientifically studying, it would be useful to do a diachronic

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research regarding how different translators have introduced a literary work or an author to their society by using different paratextual elements from the beginning up to the recent times.

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