

Book Review

Theories on the Move: Translation's Role in the Travels of Literary Theories

by Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2006, x + 241 pp., ISBN 90-420-2059-8 / 978-90-420-2059-7 [Approaches to Translation Studies, 27]

Reviewed by Çağdaş ACAR*

Much of the research in the social sciences and in the natural sciences admits, albeit only with passing comments, the existence of translation at various historical moments and in-between various cultures. Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva's book *Theories on the Move: Translation's Role in the Travels of Literary Theories*, first of all, points at the de-problematization of translation in the scholarship on the travel of theories and provides a detailed study on the indicative and formative aspects of translation in these theories' reception. The primary question of the book is, therefore, what happens when theories travel in various directions and for different audiences, based on two specific case studies. This comparative study is a highly ambitious undertaking since it analyzes how translation—and translators—form images for theories—and theoreticians—that affect their reception in host cultures, and how a theory's initial reception then affects later translations. The translation patterns of and the discussions on structuralism and semiotics in Turkey—with a specific focus on Roland Barthes—and those of French feminism in Anglo-America—with a specific focus on Hélène Cixous—are thus analyzed to reveal power differentials' relation to translation, and its relevance to the supposed universality of theories.

Taking André Lefevere's concept of rewriting, Susam-Sarajeva situates translation within a broader textual world—autochthonous texts as well as translations—to define the reception of a given theory in receiving systems. Based on this framework, chapter 2 presents a narrative of the opposition towards structuralism, semiotics, and French feminism to reveal the power differentials within and in-between these cultures. While France as an intellectual

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center allures and urges intellectuals in both Turkey and Anglo-America to seek tools for an objective literary criticism or to establish international solidarity for a feminist cause, how these respective systems perceive themselves affects their reception of structuralism, semiotics, and French feminism. The selection of texts to be translated, thus, is not only determined by the needs of these receiving systems, but it also shapes how Barthes and Cixous come to represent larger theoretical discourses and is used in their condemnation.

Chapter 3 presents the similarities and differences between these case studies based on the tropes that are articulated in the local critics' response to these theories. Methodologically, this is an important contribution to translation studies, literary studies, and historical studies since it provides textual evidence for the receiving systems' ability to transform and assimilate 'imported' theories as per their specific needs—the selectiveness of translation patterns and the erasure of difference when it is deemed useful—as opposed to unidirectional narratives of strong vs. weak cultures. While the trope of alterity is used in both systems to oppose the incoming theories, underlining their foreignness and thus translatedness, the tropes of lack and lag and solidarity and universality are used to integrate them into the receiving systems despite their alterity. The presentation of these similarities and differences is especially fruitful since they are based on two diverse contexts that suggest contrasting power differentials and they challenge those 'general principles' offered by translation theories. The chapter does discuss the concept of self-colonization to account for the trope of lack in the Turkish case as the intellectuals in Turkey look back to their own past using Western forms as yardstick, yet it does not problematize the constituents of this reception per se (the Republican oversimplification of the *Tanzimat* era as lacking originality and objectivity). The key findings and claims of the chapter—and the larger book—however, urge one to research whether the tropes of lack and alterity disappear or simply become irrelevant in the post-2000s.

Chapter 4 explores how translators, the selectiveness of their translations—their achronological appearance, absence, or delay—and the existence—and also the absence—of retranslations affect the images that are created for Barthes and Cixous in Turkey and Anglo-America. The assimilative power of receiving systems, regardless of their status vis-à-vis the so-called center or periphery, is aptly displayed through a detailed bibliographical research on the publication of primary and secondary texts. The tropes that are introduced in the previous chapter are used here in two separate narratives describing the ways in which Barthes and Cixous are simultaneously needed and resisted. Again, the similarities and differences within

the two cases are remarkable and encouraging for future research. Parallel to the formation and later contestation of the images for Barthes and Cixous, the chapter also investigates how translator profiles are instrumental in these two phenomena. While Susam-Sarajeva demonstrates how the initial images later define—and further refine—the production of translations, the analysis on the profile of translators helps us understand how these images are still subject to transformation based on translators' agency.

Based on a framework that centers receiving systems in translational phenomena, chapter 5 illustrates their non-passivity in importing theories, providing a detailed textual and extratextual material such as terminological choices—loan words and neologisms—and commentaries in the form of footnotes and endnotes. Two key observations contribute to the methodological discussions in translation studies. First, chronologically speaking it is difficult to talk about a linear history in terms of translational norms in Turkish, based on the tendencies to prefer loan words or to offer neologisms in an effort to purge words of Arabic and Persian origin. On the other hand, the very effort to create neologisms and offer very precise—yet uncommon—terms in Turkish for the concepts of structuralism and semiotics consolidates Barthes's image as representing 'scientific' and 'objective' criticism. Second, the 'non-existence' of retranslations of Cixous's works in English points at the de-problematization of translation, although certain terms of French feminism are singled out to represent its otherness and untranslatability. An important contrast between the two case studies is that while in the former there exist critical changes and shifts in the main terminology in Turkish, the 'translatability' of structuralism and semiotics never emerges as a problem per se—since there exists an expressed desire to adopt and acquire an objective method of criticism. The Anglo-American case, on the other hand, does discuss the 'impossibility' of fully rendering French feminism in anthologies and autochthonous texts, while translations themselves tend not to attract much attention to terminological issues, pushing these discussions towards footnotes and endnotes—Susam-Sarajeva explains this by the Anglo-American desire to underline feminism's universality and establish a larger solidarity, although its Frenchness and reliance of "the white fathers of psychoanalysis and linguistics" remain and remind its otherness. This non-passivity of both receiving systems is described by the analogy of receiving authorities' power in granting entry visas to theories, which itself is marked by needs and expectations from those imports.

The final chapter discusses aspects of Cixous's and Barthes's thought that do not fit into their images in the receiving systems through selective and delayed translations. While Cixous's distance to all *-isms* and the greater difficulty in penetrating into her fiction—and thus, much fewer translations from her fiction in English by 2000s—clash with the image of “Cixous the theoretician,” Barthes's essays appear in contradistinction to his image as “Barthes the structuralist and semiotician,” although there exist Turkish intellectuals who acknowledge the existence and usefulness of Barthes's essays within his thought from the appearance of his early translations in Turkish onwards.

Susam-Sarajeva's work offers two case studies within a well-structured framework of rewritings that introduce theories into receiving systems, and images that are shaped by early translations and then determine later translations. The concept of “image formation” and the contestation of these images within receiving systems over the course of time through translation—in terms of both their selectiveness and the time-factor involved in the translational activity—not only present insightful analysis into the ‘travel’ of theories across cultures, but they also encourage further research that should investigate other instances in-between other ‘check-points.’