

A Comparison of Translation Styles of Suzanne Jill Levine and Gregory Rabassa

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ÖZET Her çevirmenin kendine özgü bir çeviri yöntemi olduğu bilinmektedir. Günümüzde, pek çok çevirmenin bulunması, kullanılan çeviri yöntemlerinin karşılaştırmalı çalışmalarını da tetiklemektedir. Suzanne Jill Levine ve Gregory Rabassa, İspanyolca ve İngilizce olmak üzere aynı iki dilde tercüme yapan çevirmenlerdir. İspanyolca-İngilizce çeviriler yapan Amerika vatandaşı Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* adlı kitabında, kaynak ve erek kültürleri yakınlaştırmak ve okurun kendini rahat hissetmesini sağlamak için kullanılan çeviri yöntemine değinmektedir. Gregory Rabassa, İspanyolca ve Portekizce'den İngilizce'ye çeviriler yapan bir diğer ünlü Amerika vatandaşı çevirmendir. *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents* adlı kitabında görüldüğü gibi, Rabassa'nın çeviri yöntemi, okuyucuyu zorlaması bakımından Levine'in yönteminden çok farklıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Suzanne Jill Levine ve Gregory Rabassa'nın kendi kitaplarından hareketle, alıntılardıkları örnekler üzerinden farklılıkları öne çıkararak çeviri yöntemlerini karşılaştırmaktır. Çeviride en yaygın olarak başvurulan yöntemlerden olan "benimseme" ve "yabancılaştırma" yöntemlerinin anlamları araştırılarak, bu iki stratejinin çalışmanın konusunu oluşturan çevirilerde nasıl uygulandığı ve okuyuculara çeviride karşılık olarak ne sunulduğu incelenecektir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER benimseme, yabancılaştırma, metne bağlı çeviri, özgün çeviri, *Skopos*, yıkım.

ABSTRACT Each translator has his/her own style. Today, the presence of many translators encourages a comparative study of the various translation styles adopted. Suzanne Jill Levine and Gregory Rabassa are two translators who work between the same two languages- Spanish and English.

Suzanne Jill Levine, a US translator, translates from Spanish to English, in her book *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* talks about the translation style adopted to bring the source and the target culture closer and to make the target reader feel at home.

Gregory Rabassa is another famous translator from the US translating from Spanish and Portuguese to English. However, we see a drastic difference in the translation style adopted by Rabassa, reflected in his book *If this be treason: Translation and its dyscontents*, which takes the target reader abroad.

In this paper I intend to compare the translation styles of Suzanne Jill Levine and Gregory Rabassa with the help of the two books written by the two translators respectively, highlighting the differences through the various examples cited by the translators themselves. I will explore the meanings of the most commonly used methods in translation- domestication and foreignization- and also how these two strategies have been applied in their translations and what is being presented to the target readers with the help of examples taken from their respective written books mentioned above.

KEYWORDS domestication, foreignization, liberal translation, literal translation, *Skopos*, subversion.

The presence of many translators means the presence of various styles of translation. The different styles of translation come as a result of the different perspective that each translator may have about the act of translation and its purpose. Some would translate with the intention of transferring the meaning whereas some would put more emphasis on the narrative style used and the form whereas some would transmit just the plot to

another culture by adapting it to the receiver culture. The choice of what to translate depends on the source text and the source culture but largely on the translator's choice and interpretation of the source text. This choice is the *skopos* i.e. the 'purpose' of translation that every translator should keep in mind while translating. Among all the *skopos* also include the target readers, those for whom the translator is directing the translated version. He/she directs the text to an imaginary target reader and with the expectation of an imaginary reaction from the target reader before the translated text actually reaches one. Thus, every translator's *skopos* being different would definitely justify the difference in the styles used for translation.

Here I have two very famous translators working with the same languages- Spanish and English- but with conspicuous distinctions between their translation choices and thus the translation styles, Suzanne Jill Levine and Gregory Rabassa.

Suzanne Jill Levine is a US translator who has translated Latin American authors like Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig and Severo Sarduy. This year she won the P.E.N. Centre USA's Translation Award for her translation of the Chilean author Jose Donoso's book *The Lizard's Tale*. Her book *Escriba Subversiva: Una Poética de la Traducción* (Translation: The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction) focuses on the three Latin American authors mentioned above. This book deals with the cultural differences with their obvious influences on the language, which in turn affects translation and how she manages to bring them over to her own language. But besides the task of bringing the source text to the target readers her main intention of translation is to subvert the source text and the author of the source text to bring to the forefront the translator and make visible his/her job. She highlights the challenges faced while translating the work of the three authors mentioned above, focusing in detail on all the aspects, like the title, the language, the characters' names and their contextual significance. Each unit talks about the profound investigation that has been undertaken to arrive at the translated version. In an interview to María Constanza Guzmán published in the website by *Word Without Borders*, Jill Levine reveals what inspired her to write the book,

I was responding among other things to a comment by one of the first writers I translated, Cabrera Infante, that I had "too much ego" to be a translator—he said this, in part, because he was an ego-centric author who wanted to control the text from cover to cover and in all its translations. I wrote the book mainly, however, because I felt translating involved a rich thought process of which the reader of the finished translation would never be aware.¹

1. Maria Guzman, *An interview with Suzanne Jill Levine*, retrieved from: <http://www.wordswithout-borders.org/article/an-interview-with-suzanne-jill-levine.html>, on 6th September, 2012.

For example, in the chapter *Tres Tristes Traducciones* (literally: *Three Sad Translations*), Jill Levine talks about the Spanish title *Tres Tristes Tigres* (literally: *Three Sad Tigers*) by the author Guillermo Cabrera Infante, which she translates as *Three Trapped Tigers*. Jill Levine explains that the translated version of the title tries to maintain the sound of the alliteration tr-tr-t produced by the original title and compromises with the literal meaning, although the word *trapped* does symbolize the sadness highlighted by the Spanish title. Another chapter *La Traición de Rita Hayworth* (literally: *The Betrayal of Rita Hayworth*) deals with the translation of the title of the novel by the same name by the author Manuel Puig which she translates as *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*. She says that she chooses the verb *to betray* rather than the noun *betrayal* because of the bigger impact that the verb in English has than the noun. The rest of the chapters too continue the similar way. This book takes us into the labyrinth inside the minds of a literary translator while he/she translates.

Gregory Rabassa, also a US translator, has translated the work of various Latin American as well as Portuguese authors like the famous Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortazar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Clarice Lispector etc. He made his mark as a professional translator in the field of Latin American prose. It was his work as a translator of literary texts that led to the emergence of translation as a respected profession. Rabassa's career as a translator went to a head start with the successful translation of Julio Cortázar's, the Argentinean writer, *Rayuela*, translated into English as *Hopscotch*. Rabassa was awarded two of the most prestigious awards in the field of translation. For his translation *Hopscotch* he was awarded the National Book Award for Translation in 1967 and he bagged the P.E.N. American Centre Translation Prize in 1977 for the exceptional translation *Autumn of the Patriarch*, the original in Spanish by the famous author Gabriel García Márquez. However, it was the translation of Gabriel García Márquez's *Hundred Years of Solitude* that actually earned him a worldwide recognition as one of the most successful literary translators. The perfection of his work even led the author of the original text García Márquez to declare the translation as a better and clearer piece of work than his own original.

But it was not just translation that he confined himself to. With the actual practice of translation comes the theory. He used his work as examples for justifying his many critical comments on the recreative work carried out by translation for it to be showcased as a piece of art. These theoretical comments were taken as guidelines by the young translators to get an insight into the creativity involved in translation. *If this be treason: Translation and its dyscontents* is one such book.

This book gives just a brief idea about his take on translation and the method used for translation. The major part of this book concerns itself with the authors and their work that Rabassa has translated. For example, in the chapter on García Márquez, Rabassa talks more about his experience on translating his novels, except little bit of explanation on the translation of the title and the first sentence of the García Márquez's novel *Cien Años de Soledad* (literally: *Hundred Years of Solitude*). Nevertheless, it is through these examples quoted can an aspiring translator get an insight into Rabassa's perspective of translation. However, Rabassa puts it very clearly that for him translation is a reading as closed as possible of the original text.

Both these translators have worked with Latin American authors and have projected the work of these Latin American authors to the world. However, Suzanne Jill Levine has intended to take up translations of works of the marginalized authors in order to bring them on the same platform as the rest, the so-called canon in literature. She, being a woman translator is often questioned of her usage of the woman's voice in her during her translations of mostly male authors. But it is evident that her translations have an ironical marginalization as though she translates fewer women authors, most of the male authors are homosexuals, which is another marginalized section.

The brief introduction given above itself would be enough to understand that the perspective that Jill Levine and Gregory Rabassa have on translation are poles apart. The different methods utilized by both the translators show that their point of view of treating the target readers is different. The target readers of both the translators go through an experience different from each other while reading their respective translations. On the basis of the examples that I will be mentioning in my paper, it will be evident that the respective target readers are either made to feel at home and are made to read the text with their own domestic culture as the background or are taken abroad and familiarized with a foreign culture. These two binary experiences are achieved through the strategies of domestication and foreignization. However, these two strategies do not just define how the target readers are made to read the translation, but they also show which culture is exactly being elevated by the translator. But doesn't the translator's choice of culture to be given importance to defeat the very purpose of translation itself? Is it not the source culture that should actually be projected in the target text as well? Also, doesn't the very essence of the source text get lost in the target text if the source culture is replaced by the target culture? In this paper I would highlight the main points where Jill Levine's and Rabassa's perspectives on translation diverge and how these divergences affect the trans-

lated text and the perception by the target readers. Through the comparison of some examples taken from both the books mentioned above, I intend to look into the application of the strategies of domestication and foreignization and study the final translated version presented for the target readers through which I will be able to study the *skopos* behind the translation. This kind of research will help in understanding the loss that can occur with domestication and foreignization. It is very important to understand this because it is imperative for every translator to know what exactly to translate and what should he/she intend to communicate through the target text. A comparison between domestication and foreignization also helps in assigning a position for the source text and the target readers i.e. of the two which one gets more importance.

The most glaring difference is seen in the author-translator collaboration that takes place during a translation. In the interview mentioned above given by Jill Levine, she clearly states that she agrees with what Alastair Reid has to say about translation. He says that an ideal translation is the result of a face to face discussion where two or more people exchange their perspectives and come up with a translated version, since every translator has a different interpretation of the text and hence a different translation. Thus, Jill Levine translates with the author, but in a way asking for permission to change words in conformity with the sound of the target language and the target culture. For example, in the novel *Cobra* by Severo Sarduy, in the following sentence she changes *opio* (literally: *opium*) in Spanish to *cocaine* just to maintain the rhythmic sound produced by the original sentence.

Original version-

O en la operación, sientes que se te inclina la mesa. Oyes un chorro caer en una vasija de aluminio. Te dan opio para que resistas.²

Translated version-

Or in the operation you feel that table slopes. You hear a stream falling into an aluminum container. They give you cocaine so that you can stand it.³

In this example we see that the highlighted words produce a certain sound in both the versions. To have precisely this effect Jill Levine changes the word *opio* to *cocaine*. But it is very much visible that in the process she changes the meaning of the sentence, after all opium and cocaine are two different drugs.

2. Suzanne Jill Levine, *Escriba Subversiva: Una Poética De La Traducción* [translated by Rubén Gallo] (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), p.71.

3. Suzanne Jill Levine, *Escriba Subversiva*.

Similarly she translated the novel *Tres Tristes Tigres* by Guillermo Cabrera Infante by reading aloud the sentences till it satisfies the sound in English. For example, she translated a title *Ella cantaba boleros* (literally: *She danced boleros*) as *I heard her sing* because of the absence of an equivalent word in English for *bolero*, music of a popular Caribbean dance form. In my view Jill Levine does not limit the collaboration with the author to mere consultation and query sort of collaboration. Instead, it is quite evident in the book written by her that she changes the source text sitting with the author to make the target readers comfortable with the text.

On the other hand, Rabassa does not translate with the author; instead he only consults the author. He translated *Rayuela* by Julio Cortázar, with the help of some suggestions by the author. His so called collaboration with the author is restricted to mere consultation and clarifications of unclear doubts in the original text. In *The Translator's Voice: An Interview with Gregory Rabassa* by Thomas Hoeksema, Rabassa was asked about the direct involvement of the authors in his translations. He gave examples from various such collaborations. In case of translations of works of Mario Vargas Llosa, the famous Peruvian author, Rabassa said that Vargas Llosa was involved in the translations of his own work only to the extent of giving the translator the “real” meaning of certain phrases. Surprisingly, in the same interview he denies any collaboration with Gabriel García Márquez, the author of whose translations Rabassa became known as a worldwide successful translator. For Rabassa there are hardly any encounters with any illegible expression that may bring about the requirement to rope in García Márquez. Thus, Rabassa’s author-translator relationship is confined to a simple exchange of suggestions. In fact, he says, ‘I translate as I read the book for the first time’.⁴

In the quote below Jill Levine makes clear the purpose of her translations,

“Mi” idioma (en el cual soy también un pasajero) nunca podrá expresar las palabras del español original, pero aun así intento traerlas “a casa”, intento expresar al “otro” en mi propia versión del inglés estadounidense, ya que todos tenemos nuestro vocabulario privado e incluso una gramática personal.⁵

“My” language (in which I too am a traveler) will never be able to express the words of the original Spanish, but still I try to bring them “home”, I try to express the “other” in my own version of US English, since all of us have our own vocabulary as well as a personal grammar. (*my translation*)

She searches for equivalent words for the untranslatable words in the target language and even equivalent sources for searching appropriate words in the target language. For

4. Gregory Rabassa, *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents* (New York: New Directions Book, 2005) p.27.

5. Suzanne Jill Levine, *Escriba Subversiva*. p.24.

example, she translated the title *De donde son los cantantes* (literally: *From where are the Singers*) by Severo Sarduy to the US culture taking inspiration from James Bond movies, i.e. as close a source to the US culture as Hollywood. She translated it as *From Cuba with a Song*.

On the contrary Rabassa believes that words of one language have a close relation to the culture to which they belong because of which there are some words which are untranslatable. He leaves them as it is, without translating. As an example he takes his translation of the novel *Rayuela* in which the word *paredro* keeps appearing again and again, used to refer to the protagonist. The word *paredro* is a greek word which means *double*. Because of the lack of a translation in English, Rabassa keeps the word as it is, not substituting by any equivalent. He intends to keep the translated version as is the original version i.e. giving importance to those elements of the source text which demand importance and attention in the target text. In *The Translator's Voice*, we come across another example pointed out by Rabassa which shows the point of reference for translation being attributed to the source text,

Mostly, with these authors, region comes to bear with certain local terms scattered throughout the book. Since these words are not exotic in the context they are used in, there is no need to keep them so in translation. Indeed, Vargas Llosa often worries about this last possibility, a seeming over-exoticism in the English version where there is none in the Spanish, or at least the Peruvian version.⁶

Thus, we see that Jill Levine uses the target culture as the base for translation, while for Rabassa the dominant culture in translation is the source culture. In the book, *If this be Treason: Translation and its Dyscontents*, Rabassa says that,

'He cannot and must not set himself apart from the culture laid out before him. To do so would indeed be treasonous. He must marshal his words in such a way that he does not go counter to the author's intent'.⁷

According to the quote, the differences between the two authors that we have seen till now are very clear. With the help of an example I will explain the difference. In almost all her translations, Jill Levine has translated the names of the characters of the novels, trying to preserve the contextual sense of the names. One of the characters in the novel *La Habana para un Infante Difunto* (Translation: *Infante's Inferno*) is named *Dulce Espina* (literally: *Sweet Thorne*). It is pseudonym given to one the women seduced

6. Thomas Hoeksema, *The Translator's Voice: An Interview with Gregory Rabassa*, retrieved from: <http://translation.utdallas.edu/Interviews/Rabassa-by-Hoeksema.html>, on 3rd September, 2012.

7. Gregory Rabassa, *If This Be Treason*. p.7.

by the narrator. She translated it as *Honey Hawthorne*, with the word *Honey* symbolizing the sweetness and *Thorne* of the surname symbolizing the *espina*. She justifies this as,

‘Este nombre conserva las connotaciones dulces y espinosas del original y bien podrá ser el seudónimo de una mujerzuela estadounidense’.⁸

‘This name conserves the sweet and the thorny connotations of the original and can very well be a pseudonym of an American prostitute’. (*my translation*)

But at the same time we must also take notice of the fact that Jill Levine does not hide that it was Cabrera Infante who actually proposed the name, which means that she is not ‘treasonous’ if we follow Rabassa’s quote because she does not go against the author’s intent.

On the other hand one does not see any change in the translated version by Rabassa of the name *Rosario Tijeras* (literally: *Rosario Scissors*) in the novel by the same name written by Jorge Franco Ramos. He maintains the name as the original because of the cultural significance that the Spanish name carries. Tijeras is a nickname attached to the name Rosario due to her use of scissors as a weapon for her protection. Also, in the translation of the novel *Cien Años de Soledad* (literally: *Hundred Years of Solitude*) by García Márquez, Rabassa does not change the names like José Arcadio Buendía while translating into English and this way he takes the source culture to the target culture.

According to Lawrence Venuti, ‘domestication refers to an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the target language cultural values, bring the author back home’ and ‘foreignization refers to an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and the cultural differences of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad’.⁹

Domestication and foreignization are two strategies used in practically all the translations. A translator always finds himself in this dilemma of which of the two strategies to apply during his task of translation. His/her choice of source culture or the target culture as the base will help him/her get out of the domestication/ foreignization dilemma. It is the *skopos* i.e. the ‘aim’ or the ‘purpose’ that decides the translation and its strategies. But it is important to note what these two strategies result in. Domestication makes the target reader more comfortable with the language and the culture of the target text but a loss takes place in the process as the essence of the source text is lost. On the other hand, foreignization would make the target readers uncomfortable but would also help them get closer to the foreign culture without any loss in the source text.

8. Suzanne Jill Levine, *Escriba Subversiva*. p.87.

9. Yang Wenfen, *Brief Study of Domestication and Foreignization in Translation*, retrieved from: ojs.academy publisher. com/index.php/jltr/article/download/01017780/151, on 15th March, 2012.

On analyzing all the examples that I have mentioned of both the translators, it becomes very clear that Jill Levine's translation can be categorized under domestication, for which she herself gives the justification,

'Lejos de la idea tradicional del traductor como un escriba servil y anónimo, el traductor literario debe considerarse un escribano subversivo. Su labor destruye la forma del original a la vez que reproduce el sentido en una nueva forma. En este proceso, la traducción emerge como la extensión del original que al re-crear siempre pretende alterar la realidad'.¹⁰

'Unlike the traditional idea of the translator as a servile and an anonymous writer, a literal translator should consider him/herself as a subversive scribe. His/her task destroys the original form at the same time reproducing the meaning in a new form. In this process, the translation emerges as an extension of the original which on re-creating always tries to alter the reality.' (*my translation*)

The method of domestication and foreignization also overlaps the techniques of liberal and literal translation.¹¹ Liberal translation technique allows the translator to let himself/herself get away from the confines of the source text and translate it liberally. But at the same time literal translation allows the target reader go closer to the source culture. However, liberal and literal translation is a technique at the linguistic level while domestication and foreignization are at the cultural level.

Based on all the examples given by Jill Levine in her book it becomes clear that she has translated liberally, not restraining herself to the source text and the source culture. Instead, as can be deciphered from the quote above, she has subverted the role of the translator as a mere reproducer and has made immense efforts to make the text belong as much to the translator as to the author.

On the other hand, it is foreignization that Rabassa resorts to while translating because according to his opinion,

'In even the best of examples a translation cannot get to the marrow of what has been said in the original. A piece of writing cannot be cloned in another language, only imitated'.¹²

Through the strategy of foreignization of which literal translation, not meaning word-by-word though, is a part, Rabassa is actually trying to make the readers familiar with a foreign culture and language. He is transmitting the 'foreignness' of the text and maintaining the difference between the source and the target culture. Friedrich Schleiermacher's main motive of translation was to celebrate the difference between the

10. Suzanne Jill Levine, *Escriba Subversiva*. p.30.

11. Yang Wenfen, *Brief Study of Domestication and Foreignization in Translation*.

12. Gregory Rabassa, *If This Be Treason*. p.20.

two cultures. He had said that ‘the reader should be able to guess the Spanish behind a translation from Spanish, and the Greek behind a translation from Greek.’¹³ Similarly, in my opinion, the *skopos* behind Rabassa’s translation seems to be the same: make the target reader point the Spanishness i.e. the source behind the text. Despite the target text being an imitation, all the examples we have seen of his translations are differentiating the source culture and the target culture.

After reading all the theories and analyzing all the examples of the two translators quoted using these theories, it surely comes out as an important study on the different techniques a translator can adopt in his/her task. We have seen that the relevant technique to be adopted all depends on the *skopos* or the purpose of the translation and also on how the translator wants the target reader to react to the target text. As per Eugene Nida, the translator should translate the text in a way that he/she is able to maintain the reaction among the target readers as that of the original readers of the source text. Nida suggests that this goal can be attained by searching for dynamic equivalence in the target language. Domestication and foreignization are exactly about searching for equivalences or keeping the foreign material as it is respectively. Jill Levine is precisely looking for equivalences in the target language; however, on the basis of my study of the examples mentioned I believe that the reactions of the original readers and the target readers remain different. On the contrary, Rabassa, instead of looking for equivalences, he maintains the foreignness of the text and hence, even the reaction of the target readers. Thus, we can conclude that a loss does occur in either of the two strategies, but we can also see that the loss occurred is greater in case of domestication as it is the source culture shown in the source text which is being replaced by the target culture due to which the target readers remain ignorant of the source text. Thus, the strategies of domestication and foreignization as used in the examples cited surely raises the question of whether the motive of translation is to bring two cultures closer and diffuse them or is it to recognize and celebrate the differences between them.

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