

KİTAP İNCELEMESİ – 2

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IŞIN BENGİ ÖNER'S BOOK TITLED ÇEVİRİ BİR SÜREÇTİR...YA ÇEVİRİBİLİM?

Işın Bengi ÖNER

Sel Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1999, 158 s.

Being one of the influential scholars, researchers and critics of Translation Studies, Işın Bengi Öner has carried out many studies that paved the way for evaluating, reconsidering and analyzing translated texts on a theoretical ground. In this paper, I would like to analyze her book called *Çeviri Bir Süreçtir...Ya Çeviribilim?* published in 1999 by Sel Publishing House.

This book is actually a compilation of many different articles written by Işın Bengi Öner in previous years. In my study, I will focus mostly on Bengi's main and sub-arguments, emphasizing their strong and weak points as well as what kinds of innovations they have brought to the study of translated texts. While evaluating her book, I will contextualize the arguments and proposals she suggests, considering translation theories and approaches that were dominant at her time. For this purpose, I would like to inform you about the changes translation studies had gone through until the time this book was written. As is known, the late 1970's and the 1980's saw the rise of a descriptive approach that had its origins in comparative literature and the Russian Formalism. A pioneering centre was Tel Aviv, where Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury pursued the idea of the literary polysystem in which different literatures and genres, including translated and non-translated works, compete for dominance.

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These scholars worked together with a Belgium-based group including Jose Lambert and Andre Lefevere and with the UK-based scholars such as Susan Bassnett and Theo Hermans (Munday 2008:13). These scholars reacted to the static prescriptive models offered by linguistic oriented theories and approaches of translation. Starting to define the actual translations and the constraints having an effect in their formation, they brought the translation studies within a socio-cultural context.

While reading the book, you see that Bengi's thoughts have been affected by the above mentioned scholars to a great extent. She gives lots of space to their theories in order to justify the importance of her proposals regarding the study of translated texts. Her book can actually be considered a kind of bridge that represents the deviation from normative approaches that have not only been prevalent in translation activities, but also in the evaluations of existing translations so far. In the preface, she explains what kinds of motives forced her to write such a book, mentioning the innovations that it would possibly bring about regarding conventions that have a role in writing, talking and thinking about translation activity. According to her, this book sheds light on the following question: How did translation activities enter into a process in which they began to be questioned, analyzed and reconstructed? In order to answer this question, it is important to emphasize the role played by translators who had made a great effort in translation realm. Many translators began to share their experiences and knowledge with the ones who were at the very beginning of their career. They started a negotiation process in which they found solutions to various translational problems and when necessary they fed their arguments with the research methods and tools of other disciplines. As a result, study of translated texts from different perspectives enabled to create a scientific discipline in which translation began to be studied on an empirical basis. In this book, the descriptive paradigm that triggered this transition process has been given the highest value. As is clear from the title of the book, Bengi also questions the way translations have been analyzed and studied before. In my opinion, it was an inevitable outcome because like most translation researchers at her time, she came up against the basic problem of being faced with a text and one or more translation of it, and wondering what to say about the relations between them (Hermans 1999:55). Therefore, she prefers to start from a descriptive and empirical departure to show their contribution to translation theories and translation studies as a discipline.

This book is composed of three main parts, which is divided in itself to different sub-sections. As Bengi says, she carried out her descriptive studies in different areas in order to emphasize the fact that translation studies can be expanded to many other areas and that previous theories can be questioned and revised. For this purpose, she applies the descriptive methodology on literary texts, the translation of subtitles and dubbing translations and translation criticism respectively. Her discussions do not follow a chronological order, but she prefers to follow a topical division.

Firstly, she touches upon a very common problem related to the analysis of poetry translations. As she mentions, even though the study of translations has begun to be based on empirical grounds, Translation Studies as a discipline cannot still provide explanations for poetry translations. The main reason behind this, according to Bengi, results from stick adherence of scholars or translators to source text. Whenever they get a little further away from the structures of source text, they feel a kind of uneasiness. By giving examples both from early scholars like Sn. Jerome (1st century) and from more recent poets like Can Yücel (1985), she wants to show how people have been obsessed with this problem. Bengi argues that in order to solve these kinds of problems, we need a theory that will account for the activities of the ones who carry out literary translations (p.14). Until that time, literary translations were left out of the scope in terms of translation theories. Therefore, evaluations of these kinds of texts were mainly based on subjective value judgments. Contrary to general tendency in translation evaluations, Bengi exemplifies a sonnet by William Shakespeare and gives two different translated versions of it at the same time. While Saadet-Bülent Bozkurt prefer to apply a more source oriented approach, Can Yücel renders the poem in a more free way. However, we see some shifts in both of the translations when compared to their originals. The translators explain the motives behind their deviations from some source text structures. In their remarks, we see a common point, which is the target side that has an effect on the formation of the translated text. After analyzing the sample translations, Bengi concludes that translation is a target oriented activity, giving reference to Toury's assumptions that if we think so then we can remove the derivative, secondary nature of translated literatures. In addition to this, Bengi also lays stress on the importance of target system in which translated literature is in relationship with other co-systems, which has an effect on the formation of translated text. (1987: 58-67). What is more, Bengi tries to draw attention to the fact that the period in which translation is carried out plays a role on

translator's decisions. Therefore, it is not appropriate to consider translation as static phenomena. When we consider the statements made above, we can say that Bengi tries to redefine the task of Translation Studies. According to her, Translation Studies should be target-oriented, systemic, diachronic and it should provide theoretical grounds for the evaluation of literary translations. As a follower of the descriptive paradigm, she wants to show what other meanings can be inferred from translated texts or translation processes when target side is taken into consideration. In her approach, actual translations are tried to be described with objective translation theories.

However, Bengi was not the first and only scholar who stressed the need to have a literary translation theory. Long before her book, Akşit Göktürk discussed this problem in his book called *Çeviri: Dillerin Dili* which was published in 1986. According to him, "lack of a constructive theory for literary translations causes successful translated works to stay at the margins. Because of this lack of an objective ground, literary translations have not been able to given their deserved status. In order to prevent this, it should be accepted that the norms affecting the reception of translated texts should be paid as much attention as those that affect the formation of source texts" (1986:105-108). As can be understood, the same call had already been made by another Turkish scholar before Bengi did.

Secondly, Bengi draws attention to another misleading outcome of strict source oriented approaches, which are the pseudo-translations. As we know, pseudo-translations are "texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts in other languages ever having existed- hence no factual 'transfer operations' and translation relationships- that go under the name of pseudo- translations, or fictitious translations" (Touy 1995: 40). However, Bengi suggests that we study these kinds of texts in order to see the norms that affect the reception and formation of translations in a given culture. According to her, descriptive studies to be applied on pseudo-translations would shed light on the norms and constraints adopted during the time when the translation was produced (p.33). In order to justify this statement, she gives an example from a very well known novel called *Genç Kızlar* written by Nihal Yeğinoğlu in 1950. Before meeting her face to face, Bengi examines the translated text and tries to find some justifications that make the text accepted as a translation. After examining the whole text, Bengi concludes that the author follows a very source oriented approach in her project and

foregrounds the source elements a lot in her book (p.33). In my opinion, Bengi's argument is completely right as when you look at the whole book, you see that Yeğınobalı deliberately created foreign elements such as foreign proper names and foreign syntactic structures. Actually as what pseudo-translations often do, [...], she tried to incorporate in her text features which have come to be associated, in the (target) culture in question, with translation (1995:47). For this reason, everyone assumed it a translation until she admitted that it was not. At this part, Bengi re-states the importance of target culture in the analysis of target texts. In addition to this, she brings her discussion a step further and starts to talk about the importance of norms in shaping translation activities.

At the following part, she adds an interview made with the author, Nihal Yeğınobalı who had spent 40 years in translating until that time. I believe that by putting an interview in her book, Bengi wanted to provide an evidence for what she had commented on the author and her book. It is an indication of Bengi's preference to provide objective explanations for issues related to translation studies. From the questions that she prepared, it is easy to understand that Bengi aimed at learning the dominant norms of Yeğınobalı's time that used to restrict the production of both original writings and translations. Yeğınobalı was asked about why she chose to present her book as translation. She answered this question, mentioning that it was impossible for a young girl to write a book that dealt with sexuality during 1950's. Therefore, in order to be accepted in the target literary system, she had no other chance. What Yeğınobalı resorted to was like benefiting from the target norms that acknowledge translations with much greater tolerance at her time (p.37). As Toury suggests, "Another explanation which has sometimes been offered for distinguishing texts as translations is an author's fear of censorial measures against him-/herself or his/her work" (1995:42). The motive behind Yeğınobalı's decision can be answered in relation to this statement.

We can infer other points from this interview regarding the features of norms stated above. When she was asked whether she would present the book as a translation providing that she had produced it in 1990, she answered like this: "I think it would be my original version because now there are more opportunities in for the courageous young girls and women" (p.41). In this sentence, it is obvious that the norms affecting the production of original writings were different in 1990's from those of 1950's, which reminds me Toury's definition of norms. While defining the

difficulties in any attempt to account for norms, he mentions the socio-cultural specificity of norms and their instability (1995:62). In Yeğınobalı's sentence, it is obvious that dominant norms had changed. Another important point that can be deduced from this interview is that Yeğınobalı mentions the role of publishing industry in determining the discourse of translation. When we look at the book, we can conclude that the discourse imposed by the publishing industry during 1950's was keeping the foreignness of source side. Translators' strategies had to be shaped in accordance with the source culture elements. Therefore, as Toury also states, studying pseudo-translations can reflect what a society has become conscious of in its conception of translation (1995:46).

After discussing the roles of norms in Translation Studies, Bengi continues her discussion with a descriptive study on different translations of *La Dame Aux Camelias by Alexandre Dumas*. Before starting to describe the norms that has affected the translating activity, she refers to İsmail Habib Sevük, who produced a criticism on these translations. When you look at what he says in his evaluations, it is possible to comment that he qualifies translations in accordance with their degree of loyalty to their source texts and thus prefers Mithat Cemal's version carried out in 1937. On the other hand, he dismisses Ahmet Mithad's translated version as being less loyal to the source text and culture (1880), saying that Ahmet Mithad carried out his translation not word for word, but sense-for sense (p.48). However, when Bengi analyzes the whole translated texts according to preliminary norms as Toury terms it, she finds out that all of the translators actually tried to represent the source text elements in their translations. While carrying out her analysis, Bengi looks at other factors apart from syntactic and lexical elements such as prefaces. As Bengi says, prefaces are highly important to understand translator's main task in a specific translation projects and they help us re-evaluate translator's decisions. On the other hand, Bengi realizes that some shifts are apparent in these texts. While evaluating these shifts, Bengi pays attention to the dominant poetics of the time when these translations were carried out (p.62). As is clear, one should not jump at the evaluations the critics present us regarding any kinds of translations. We had better be aware of the fact that translations somehow reflect the dominant ideologies and poetics of their time. Like translations, criticisms on translated texts can also reflect the dominant ideologies. As Bengi suggests, in order to give influential translators their due position within the literary system, we have to be careful about our value-driven judgments (p.63).

From the examples given in the same section, it is possible to conclude that in order to understand the motives behind translator's decisions, just comparing source text elements with those of target text's will be of very limited help. If we want to carry out comprehensive study on any translated text, we need to take other paratexts into consideration. These paratexts may include, as is the case in this book, prefaces written by translators, translators' comments on their own translations, criticism made on the translated texts. However, they are not just restricted to these factors. We can also examine cover pages, reviews, advertisements (if any), and memoirs to gain insight into what actually happens in the process of translation formulations.

In the second part, Bengi talks about another common problem regarding evaluations of subtitle and dubbing translations. According to Bengi, bilingual listeners that listen to the original version of a text compare its subtitle or dubbing translations simultaneously and do not like the translated version very much (p.79). The reason behind this tendency results from the fact that these bilingual listeners judge translations only on language and lexical levels. As you can understand, we again face a similar problem that restricts the definition of translation activities. However, as Bengi argues, a film does not just consist of language, but it also includes other non-linguistic elements in itself. What is more, it is important to know for what purpose the film has been produced. As various factors have a role in translation process, ending up with some shifts is an inevitable outcome.

When we look closely at the examples given by Bengi, we see that each shifts resulted from different constraints. For instance, lip synchronization caused big changes while dubbing a scene from the film called *The Young and the Restless* (p.85). Another example sheds a light on a different restriction that may have been imposed by domestic institutions. While examining a scene from the film *Golden Girls*, Bengi remarks that the word "prostitution" was not translated into Turkish. If we are to evaluate this omission in the translated text, we should also keep in mind that Turkish Radio and Television Association may have played a restrictive role and prevented its transfer (p.91). With this example, Bengi manages to provide us with real-life evidences which show that sometimes it is not the source text or the translator, but the other outside factors that trigger changes in translations.

Defining these changes as “shifts”, Bengi tries to imply that she is different from most of the translation critics of her time. From the way how she uses the word “shift”, it is apparent that she has been influenced from Anton Popovic’s concept of “shift of expression” in her translation analysis (1981). Like Popovic, she argues that the fact that the process of translations for films involves some kinds of shifts in both the semantic properties of the text does not mean that the translator wishes to underemphasize the semantic appeal of the original (1981:79). In order to reinforce her arguments, she traces these changes not just to differences in two language structures, but also the differences in the methods of presenting the subject matter. For instance, the challenges a translator experiences when he/she is creating a dubbing translations may differ from those when he/she produce a subtitle translation. Therefore, it is possible to say that translators can be independent when necessary “in order to reproduce on original as a living work” in spite of differences resulting from linguistic and non-linguistic elements (1981:80).

Because of the factors stated above, Bengi proposes that study of film translations should be included in Translation Studies. According to Bengi, this is the best possible way to examine the norms that affect the translations processes of such texts with empirical methods. As an alternative method, she suggests that we should adopt Andre Lefevere’s theoretical framework to provide possible answers for many divergences in verbal presentations of films in another languages. In this context, she places translations for television into its own system within a larger system in target culture and explains how the professionals within the system, patronage outside the system affects the makeup of the translated versions. After talking to many translators working in this realm, she concludes that the most vital constraint translators face results from time and money factor, which reminds us Lefereve’s discussion about the economic status under the notion of patronage. As translators are not given the money that they deserve, they sometimes make concessions regarding the quality of their translations for the sake of earning their living.

Finally, I would like to discuss Bengi’s approach to translation criticism. As she mentions, scholars or translators working on translation criticism have neglected to base their ideas on a theoretical frameworks, finding it meaningless to explain such a creative activity with theories (p.111). However, Bengi asserts that even though such critics try to keep themselves away from theoretical explanations, their writings implicitly

include a theoretical framework, which is apparent from their statements that involve common judgments regarding translation activity of their time. Therefore, it is not possible to keep yourself away from theories however hard you try. Like Newmark, Bengi stresses that translations criticism's importance as a "link between translation theory and practice (1988: 184). If we evaluate translation criticism in such a way, then we can build up a critical awareness, independent from the value judgments that are made without reference to objective criteria. However, we should not accept all theories so readily, but question their validity and relevance to the translation activities of our time. For instance, when Bengi analyzes some criticism of translations by different scholars or translators, she sees that they are still under the influence of past evaluative practices of western theories before 20th century. As we know, early western translation theories adopt a prescriptive approach to translation activity, putting some principles in order to direct translator's decisions during their translation process. They describe translations as "good" or "bad" without seriously questioning or qualifying those adjectives. As a result, we end up having translation criticisms that are far away from the realities of the translation. According to Bengi, in order to create a systematic translation criticism that does not include prescriptive, value-driven, process oriented theories, we need to focus on Toury's target-oriented theory (p.118). She draws attention to the fact that with his theory, new perceptions regarding translation activity have emerged in translation studies and as a result it has opened new possibilities to deal with translated texts. As the theory suggests, we should start to evaluate translations from the target side because it is important to know the position and function of the translated text within its corresponding system to determine the norms and constraints that have had an effect in the realization of these texts in target culture. In other words, Bengi also believes that it is not so much important to decide how source texts should be translated, but instead why and how a texts is translated and what function it has in the target culture. As can be understood, Bengi tries to attain a target text an independent position in target side, freeing it from the strict rules that almost full equivalence between source and target texts. If we consider all other factors, constraints and norms that affect the translation process, we can contribute to creating more objective criticism on any works of art and hence give them their well-deserved position in a target literary system. For this reason, Bengi carries out a meta-criticism on some writings produced by important scholars of translation studies and shows how they cannot keep themselves away from value judgments. In one of the meta-

criticism, she discusses Suat Karantay's evaluation of theatre translations published in 1989. Bengi pays attention to whether Karantay presents a theoretical background to his discussions and what kind of language he uses in his explanations. Even though he does not explicitly provide a theoretical background in his criticism, it is possible to deduce it from the statements he makes. For instance, in one of his sentences, he states that "translation quality has not improved" for the theatre translations that were carried out during 1940's. (1989: 87). However, he does not provide any explanation regarding its probable reason or what he means by quality in translation. What is more, he says "that in translation, not only "true", but also "beautiful" translation is expected" from the translator (p.123). As is clear, for Karantay what directs a translation criticism consists of adjectives like "true" and "beautiful". Finally, Karantay suggests that in order to improve the quality of theatre translation in Turkey, some basic rules must be formulated. When we consider all of the statement he made, it is just to say that he is still under the influence of western translation theories before 20th century though many new trends have been introduced in translation studies since that time. From this specific example, we can conclude that it is of vital importance to examine and question translation theories in detail and decide which parts of them should be reflected on translation criticisms of today's world. Therefore, it is not enough just to provide a theoretical explanation for your evaluations, but you need also to correct, revise and even provide new theories when necessary. According to Bengi, only by doing so, we can save ourselves from the contradictory opinions that are dominant in translation criticism (p.133). In order to manage it, Bengi suggests that a new Translation Studies department which particularly deals with comprehensive studies of translation theories, their revisions and corrections should be founded so that the seeds of a new critical awareness could be sown.

Before moving to the last section, I would like to mention Bengi's approach to the notion of translator. Unlike many people of her time, she does have respect both for translator's and their decisions. Giving examples from different translators of different periods and trying not to evaluate but mainly describe their translation strategies, methods or decisions, she tries to be fair and impartial against them. She does not talk about them in negative terms, but define them positively. What is more, she draws attention to some of the translator's contribution to literary system. For instance, while talking about Ahmed Midhat, she calls him as "an expert of word".

In the final part of her book, Bengi problematizes the issue of "error identification". We know that the error identifications have no doubt characterized many translations criticism so far. In order to eliminate this tendency, some scholars have suggested a different solution. Bengi mentions two of them, suggested by Karantay and Kirkoğlu. While Karantay proposes not to criticize translated texts involving errors, Kirkoğlu desires that such texts should be retranslated. However, Bengi believes that there is disunity in the way they go from a problem to its solution (p.142). She gives example from different translations of the poem by Tuğrul Tanyol, including her own translation. Firstly, she discusses the points that she has found weak or improper within the context of the poem, providing objective reasons for her statements. After discussing such points, she offers her version that account for some weaknesses existing in other versions. But she does not define any of them as completely faulty, mentioning that each of them has a kind of equivalence to that of the source text. Trying to explain possible reasons behind such kinds of erroneous decisions, she wants us to become aware of the fact that errors can also be instructive to understand different norms surrounding the translated texts. On the other hand, what Karantay and Kirkoğlu suggest seems unpractical and sometimes unrealistic. It may not be always possible to retranslate every work of art just because they include some kinds of mistakes on any level or it may prevent us from evaluating some masterpieces and hence trivialize their importance.

Bengi points out that the reason why Karantay and Kirkoğlu feel worried about defining errors can result from their adherence to descriptive translation theories because these theories do not allow to study any kinds of errors, but instead the norms and constraints shaping translation processes (p.152). Another reason suggested by Bengi focuses on James Holme's maps and the divisions it suggests regarding the theoretical and applied side of Translation Studies. (1975). Bengi states that we should not just deal with translation criticism either as a part of descriptive or an applied branch of Translation Studies. In other words, translation criticism both influences and is influenced by the descriptive studies. Examining some obvious errors and providing solutions for them, as a result, would not move it away from its primary purpose of putting translation studies on empirical grounds. Instead, it would enable translation critics to apply a constructive approach in their criticisms.

In conclusion, my point of departure in this paper is Işın Bengi Öner's analysis of the role descriptive paradigm has played on the transition from the actual translation activities towards the Translation Studies as an academic discipline. Focusing on her perspective regarding translation and translation criticism, I wanted to show how different proposals she has offered when compared to the other critics or translators of her time such as Suat Karantay and Necmiye Alpay. While evaluating her opinions, I have usually tried to contextualize it, taking previous theoretical developments into consideration and thus based my judgments in relation to them, attempting to show how inclusive or reductionist (if so) her solutions in her own time. Dealing not only with translation, but also with translation criticism from a descriptive perspective can be considered the strongest features of the book. Giving many examples from the Turkish context, Bengi wants us to question our own stereotyped notions of translation and translator.

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