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Doctoral thesis – summary

**THE TRANSLATION OF CRITICAL
DISCOURSE. FRENCH-ROMANIAN
DOMAINE**

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Thesis summary

Keyword : critical discourse, specialized language, text typology, *skopos*, translation strategy, translation competence

Introduction. Our thesis, entitled *The translation of critical discourse. French-Romanian domain* wants to make evident the manner in which francophone literary criticism from the XXth century has been translated into Romanian. It is a field which, at first sight, does not seem to raise translation problems but which proves to be a very complex operation, necessitating not only linguistic but also extralinguistic and professional knowledge and prior experience.

The main purpose of our thesis is to render evident the translation strategies of the critical discourse as discourse finding itself between philosophy and scientificity, taking into account the still disputed inclusion of literary criticism among other sciences. Starting from a great linguist's and translation scholar's definition who noticed since 1960's that translation consists in producing in the target language the message of the source text, first in terms of signification¹ we can observe that literary criticism needs translation strategies which must be

¹ G. Mounin, *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction*, Gallimard, Paris, 1963, p.12.

raised from each translator's translation competence and professional background.

The main hypothesis we have formulated takes into account the fact that critical discourse is specialized, since it is not accessible to the general audience. Consequently, translation strategies have been selected so as to transmit the source text message towards the target culture in an adequate and comprehensible manner, including cultural bound terms, word plays which are evident throughout our corpus. Among the main objectives of our thesis, we may cite: presenting literary criticism as an autonomous discipline, having a scientific statute; render evident critical theories compiling our corpus; systemizing translation theories in order to lay emphasis on textual and functionalist approaches; establishing how specialized texts work and which are their components, focusing on literary criticism; proposing a model for translation analysis based on C. Nord's model; analyzing translation strategies used during the translation process with regard to concepts and sentences in which they are used.

The approach we are proposing is audacious and complex, considering the fact that such an attempt of classification of literary criticism into a certain text typology following the present taxonomies has not been done yet. Our approach is much more difficult because critical discourse has

not been included in any translation theory book, considering its ambiguous statute from an epistemological point of view.

As research methods, we have used syntheses, analogies, comparisons between different translation theories and taxonomies from a textual and functionalist point of view in order to find a model for translation analysis to be applied to our corpus. We are also proposing an inductive approach consisting in the choice of the source texts, their integration into a determined context, their insertion into an existent text typology, the contrastive analysis of translations, of language varieties, of cultural adaptations. We also use a deductive method by valorizing the prefaces, the introductory studies or the final notes signed par the translators in person or by other specialists, university professors, as well as translator's notes where they frequently justify their terminological choices or give supplementary information about the cultural turn of problematic structures.

Contemporary translation theories (textual, functionalist, cultural) have offered us the possibility to review the translation problem as vector for culture and knowledge which must be transmitted to another culture. We may speak about concepts such as *equivalence* and *faithfulness*, whose degree depends on the text type to translate. The complex process represented by translation justifies the choice of our

theme for research. The discourse on translation will exist forever, being thus a subject matter of present interest in many other domains, such the one we have decided to render evident, the francophone critical discourse. The development of critical approaches in the XXth century has influenced the study of literary works, opening the way to other perspectives for literary text analysis. Everybody recognizes authors such as Barthes, Genette, Todorov, Mauro, Groupe μ , for mentioning just some of the authors forming our corpus. The discourse on translation practice will never cease, consequently, we have decided to apply them to a domain which has not yet found its place in the contemporary or traditional translation theories, considering its specificity and problematic issues which may appear during the translation process either from a terminological point of view or a cultural one. We can observe how the context, the text type, the cultural turn, the translator's experience will determine the most adequate translation strategy.

The structure of our thesis comprises three parts, divided in seven chapters. Each chapter treats a different aspect.

The first part – **Literary criticism, an autonomous discourse** – wants to render evident the characteristics of literary criticism as autonomous discourse, focusing on the

contributions of the francophone literary criticism by its research directions in the XXth century.

In the first chapter – **Defining literary criticism** – we have decided that it is necessary to define and make a diachronic survey over the evolution of literary criticism, so as to render evident the characteristics of the French new criticism and the renewal of ideas it has supposed. Thus, literary criticism, besides other disciplines such as literary history and theory aims at studying literary works. A. Béguin considers that the departure point of each critical approach is the need to respond to a personal demand² and not a research on an author's biography and works. For R. Barthes, the object of criticism would be a discourse on another discourse which cannot be qualified as true or false. We have focused on the scientific statute of literary criticism, considering the debate over the concept of “literary science”, phrase where there are gathered two terms axiological opposed. Since 1842, this phrase is used by Rosenkranz so as at the beginning of the XXth century it has been introduced in other countries. Linguistic theories applied to literary studies represent a turning point in this context. R. Wellek himself noted that the issue of literary

² A. Béguin, *Création et destinée : essais de critique littéraire : l'âme romantique allemande, l'expérience poétique, critique de la critique*, Seuil, Paris, 1973, p. 167.

criticism was much greater in England, where the concept of “literary science” has been easier accepted. In order to render evident the major contribution of French criticism, we have decided to summarize the main contributions of the psychocriticism, thematic criticism, sociocriticism, structuralism, semiotics, which have opened the way to original interpretations of literary works.

The second chapter – **Characteristics of critical discourse** – aims at presenting criticism as metadiscourse, which has a certain degree of specialization. F. Thumerel was talking about criticism as literary metadiscourse, *i.e.* a discourse on literature, a discourse talking about itself, since literature needs a metadiscourse³. As J. Demers points out⁴, considering criticism as metadiscourse helps us to identify the characteristics and the relationship between poetics / criticism / writing. The concept of *discourse* proves to be very important throughout our thesis, considering its contextual and situational side without which translation analyses would be impossible. We have decided to observe how a large domain such as literary criticism has been translated into Romanian, focusing

³ F. Thumerel, *La Critique littéraire*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2000.

⁴ J. Demers, « Critique et écriture: faut-il vraiment les distinguer ? », *Etudes françaises*, n° 33, vol. 1, 1997, p. 31.

on a number of works presenting a certain terminology or discourse typology.

The second part of our thesis – **Modern translation theories** – develops the analysis methods of the corpus in order to dress up a model for translation analysis which could be used for all text types.

Thus, the third chapter – **Translation – dilemma and conceptual controversies** – opens the way to a more systematic analysis of translation theories developed subsequently. We want to offer a definition for a “correct” translation, by raising for discussion some keywords in Translation Studies, *faithfulness* and *equivalence*. The dialectics of these notions have caused many debates, starting from the Babel Tour until present day, so that the definitions are frequently based on these concepts or on the concept of *message*. If in the 1960’s G. Mounin noted that translation would be the passage of the meaning of a text from one language to another, A. Berman considered that the translation purpose is to be a link between languages. As for U. Eco, he argued that the translation is “almost the same thing”⁵. The translator must transmit for the recipient culture first the message according to the linguistic resources of the target

⁵ U. Eco, *Dire presque la même chose : Expériences de traduction*, Grasset, Paris, 2007, p. 10. [Our translation]

language. G. Steiner was talking about the “radical tension” existing between the operations of reproduction and recreation which affect the source text. Translator’s mastership is based on his/her professional background and experience in order to obtain what Nida called “dynamic” or “functional equivalence”.

We arrive thus to the forth chapter – **Towards a science of translation** – where we develop in a systematic manner the translation theories which best support the analysis of the corpus undertaken in the third part of our thesis. Translation Studies as science dates since the XXth century and has at its disposal an impressive bibliography, considering the development of textual linguistics, pragmatics, anthropological and cultural studies, psychology, philosophy. These theories aim at offering to translators a guideline to follow in their attempt to render a text into another language. We start to see translation not only as product but also as a very complex process, which implies more than simple linguistic knowledge. Theorists such as C. Catford or P. Fawcett were favoring the linguistic side of translation, which would be but a linguistic transfer from one language to another, without taking into account the situation of communication, the cultural-bound terms, the presuppositions etc. Considering the evolution of thoughts with regard to discursive theories and translation, the

approach of Translation Studies as science proves to be very important because it offers some guides for the translators. Thus, once the linguistic approach of translation has been surpassed, we synthesize translation theories developed in Netherlands (J. Holmes, J. Lambert, R. van des Broeck), Israel (G. Toury și I. Even-Zohar), Great Britain (S. Bassnett, T. Hermans), United States (A. Lefevere, D. Robinson, L. Venuti), France (G. Mounin, A. Berman, H. Meschonnic, J.-R. Ladmiral), Germany (K. Reiss, C. Nord, H. Vermeer), in order to concentrate on the approaches which represent the focus of our thesis, the textual and functionalist theories of translation. In the case of the text typology proposed by K. Reiss, we have included literary criticism in the first type, *i.e.* the informative texts, according to the characteristics given by the author to this category. The translator's strategies depend on the text type and on the translation *skopos*, its function in the target culture. The *skopos* theory, developed by scholars such as H. Vermeer, K. Reiss, C. Nord, J. Holz-Mänttari, has been seen as a very important trend, according to J. Munday.

The third part – **Contrastive analysis of literary criticism works** – proposes an analytical and synthetical approach of the corpus. At the beginning of the fifth chapter – **Particularities of specialized translation applied to critical discourse** – we considered that it is necessary to present the

characteristics of the specialized translation, because we have seen the critical discourse as being specialized (according to the different degrees of specialization which we will render evident by specific examples). It is not always so simple to define a specialized language and we are still waiting for a final response to the question concerning the connection between common language and specialized language. As J. Demers points out, specialized language means the all the linguistic and pragmatic factors which work together in order to form the discourse produced by some specialized fields⁶. It is evident that literary criticism, even if it uses concepts belonging to common language, is addressing to specialists. If it gives another meaning to terms already existing or if it introduces new concepts, the reader must have a prior knowledge in order to decipher the message of the source text, considering in the same time the amount of definitions, tables, schemes, graphics, present at authors like C. Bremond, J. Lintvelt, J. Kristeva ou chez le Groupe μ . Concepts such as *obsessive metaphor*, *personnel myth*, *heterodiegetic narration*, *homodiegetic narrator*, *tabular lecture*, *metaplasms*, *metasemes*, *metataxes*, *metalogisms*, *isotopy*, *progressive metamorphose*,

⁶ J. Roald, « Polylexicalité : Examen structurel à la lumière du discours juridico-économique », in Heribert Picht (ed.), *Modern Approaches to Terminological Theories and Applications*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2006, p. 199.

narration (récit, histoire), *deviation* (écart), *reiterative time*, for mentioning just some of the terms, show the complexity of the critical discourse which undertakes a dialectics concerning the study of literary works.

Consequently, the sixth chapter – **C. Nord’s model for translation analysis** – develops a model for translation analysis proposed by C. Nord. This model is based on two types of factors, intratextual and extratextual, which can be applied to the source text as well as to the target text. Among the intratextual factors, Nord includes the subject matter, the presuppositions, the lexical and syntactical characteristics of the text, the suprasegmental elements, the effect, the non verbal elements. The extratextual factors comprise the sender and his/her intention, the audience, the medium, the place, the time, the motive, the text function.

After having applied to the works of our corpus the translation analysis proposed by Nord, which must be prior to any translation activity, the seventh chapter – **Criticism, between philosophy and exact sciences. How to translate it ?** – analyzes in a more detailed manner the strategies used in the translation of concepts, sentences, language varieties belonging to authors such as G. Poulet, T. Todorov, Ch. Mauron, G. Durand, R. Barthes, C. Bremond, G. Genette, Groupe μ , J. Lintvelt. We have ranged the text types according

to a growing degree of specialization in order to observe the complexity of the translation process. The calques, the literal translations or the loans are the most used strategies for this type of discourse, instance where the translator resorts to translator's notes or final notes so as to explain their choice or the difficulties they encountered while translating a certain concept. This is the reason why we have decided to analyze in a subchapter apart the translator's notes and their importance in the translation process. The cultural-bound terms, the word plays prove to be inevitable in any discourse; consequently, translation strategies will be different (adaptation, omission, adding, borrowing). The translation of titles may raise some translation problems, considering the major function the title has as main element which captures the reader's attention.

Finally, the conclusions confirm our initial hypotheses. The critical discourse enjoys a high degree of erudition, notions and concepts created by their authors or borrowed from the common language and reused in a particular context. Consequently, translation strategies have followed the same way concerning the freedom and the constraints translators must obey to during the laborious and complex process of translation.

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