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Doctoral thesis

Translation as transfer of cultural capital in post-communist Romania.

Sociological approach

Summary

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Key words: sociology of translation, translation flows, post-communist Romania, circulation of cultural and symbolic goods, translation policies, publishing policies, internationalisation, globalisation.

Summary

Increasing globalisation has caused a debate on the social and cultural role of translation within historically and culturally determined contexts, both at national and international level. The year 1989 represents a turning point in the history of Europe in general, as well as in the way the theory and practice of translation has developed. The collapse of communism in Romania marked an opening of the society at the level of structures, representations and mentalities, which caused its repositioning towards the autochthonous and foreign values. This is equally echoed in translation both as import and export of knowledge and cultural capital inscribed in the flow of cultural and symbolic values. The new social, political and spiritual context re-launched the debate on the direction which Romania should follow in its way towards (re)modernisation. Questions on important issues such as the relation between tradition and innovation, national and European culture, form and content, autochthonisation or westernisation, progress through imitation or through critical selection of the imported ideas and so on, are being asked and debated upon by the contemporary society. Similarly to the 19th century, the two options which were revealed to Romania were, on the one hand the linear development based on traditions, on the cultural, social and economic heritage or, on the other hand, the adoption of the evolution models created and applied by the developed countries and related to this, the synchronisation with the Western Europe. The issue of the progress of the Romanian culture being related to the Western culture (through imitation) or, on the contrary, to the authentic tradition (organic evolution), a topic largely debated by the intellectuals of the interwar period, was reiterated in the attention of the post-communist society. Translation as vehicle of the import of ideas originating from foreign cultures has been in the centre of the debates on the direction which Romania should follow in its way towards modernisation.

Built on Bourdieu's theory on the production and reproduction of cultural knowledge, this research aims at analysing translation as transfer of cultural and symbolic capital in the context of post-communist Romania (1990-2007), the roles which this socio-cultural activity played within the rise of democracy and the liberalisation of the cultural goods market, as

well as the impact which the former had on the development of the Romanian cultural polysystem, in the concerned period. The research applies to the publishing field and the translation policies in play, which we consider to be paradigmatic for the flow of cultural capital in the post-communist era. According to Sapiro, the translation flows represent a good indicator of the evolution of the exchanges between cultures (Sapiro 2008: 20).

We consider translation in post-communist Romania to have become a common strategy, a customary practice which proved to be necessary to the national publishing field, a setting troubled by the socio-political reality and equally undergoing a continuous reshaping process. The path to democracy, historically marked by the fall of communism, represented an opening towards otherness, while translation has been a privileged vehicle for the revelation of what, in the terms of Ricœur's philosophy of otherness, is known as the "hospitality of language" (Ricœur 2005).

The thesis of our research posits the existence of a synchronism between the social, political, economic and cultural transformations that society underwent after 1990 on the one hand, and translation as transfer of cultural and symbolic capital on the other, and vice-versa. Thus, the translations published in Romania after 1990 reflect the dynamics of the post-communist society, the challenges and the changes that characterised the transition towards a modern and increasingly international polysystem.

Our research is based on the sociology of translation, a field that is being continuously explored and whose findings aim at building a holistic model for analysing translation and its impact on the human sciences. We consider that the sociological analysis of translation as practiced in the post-communist Romania is relevant and appropriate in as much as it deals with a field that has been little, if any, investigated by translation scholars or sociologists, both at national and international level. This approach opens up new perspectives of understanding the evolution of the target language and culture through translation.

From the point of view of the methodology of research, we used the statistical survey method which allows to assemble the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses, to compare them and establish classifications based on similarities and norms. Although the statistics represent significant quantitative arguments, it is very important to also take into account and study the absorption, the assimilation by the Romanian culture of the explosion of information that burst after 1990, its echoes, its reflections on the Romanian literature and on the development of the contemporary culture. This statement has important consequences at the level of methodology of our research: the analyses are not made in isolation, but in constant relation to the indigenous (literary) creation.

The sociology of translation is valued for analysing in-depth the social and cultural mechanisms of translation in a given socio-cultural context. For the study of the publishing field, several sources of input data have been used: the Romanian National Library, more particularly *the Catalogue of the Romanian publishing houses*, a collective work gathering almost 5 000 book publishers registered between January 1990 and August 2007, whose catalogues are drawn from both national and international book market, UNESCO's *Index Translationum* database, as well as our own database built on analyses of the catalogues of the selected six publishing houses active in the period concerned (Humanitas, Institutul European, Nemira, Polirom, Curtea Veche and Paralela 45), the analyses of their electronic catalogues and their internet websites. The statistical analyses, both quantitative and qualitative, on the one hand, as well as the interviews with publishers selected from the national newspapers and magazines and the articles related to the publishing market, on the other hand, provide an in-depth perspective on this field and its social, economic and cultural implications. The quantitative analysis of the literary translation in Romania (1990-2007) is built on a series of variables: the publishing production with special focus on the role played by the translation policies, the source languages and their relation to the target language and culture, the logic behind the transfer process mediated through translation (commercial, cultural or a combination of the two), the profile of the publisher, of the translator and of other agents involved in the book chain, constituting recognition or discovery guarantees for the capital and symbolic capital in play. The following parameters have been used for the quantitative and qualitative analyses: the author, the title of the publication, the year of publication, the collection, the source language and the translator. The publishing genres have been established according to sixteen indicators: art, practical books, religion, literature, philosophy, literature for children, general books, human sciences, history, mixed publications, essays, scientific books, bibliographical books, magazines and audio books. Our quantitative survey on the corpus built of the six selected publishing houses revealed in total 7 168 books published within the period 1990-2007, out of which 4 082 are translations, representing thus a translation rate of 57%.

Four chapters structure our argumentation on the socio-cultural function of translation in post-communist Romania, according to a sociological approach. Thus, the first chapter is built as a historical incursion in the problematic of the constitution of the modern Romanian culture. This latter is defined as a convergence culture, defined by continuity and breaking-of, tradition and innovation. The three paradigms taken into account shape the development of the modern Romanian culture, acknowledged in its relation to the national identity

consciousness, to the world culture, but also to a repressive political ideology which strongly affected the country's progress. With each paradigm we have introduced a general analysis of translation, with the aim to map out its evolution and thus set the framework for the qualitative and quantitative researches dealt with in the subsequent chapters. We particularly focused on translation's strong rooting in the Romanian culture.

The 1989 revolution signalled the crawling of communism, followed by a turning point, a cultural, social, economic and political thaw. It was therefore a political, but also an ideological and a symbolical revolution. In the second chapter we give a general overview on the building process of the post-communist Romanian society, which has been analysed in terms of four main factors, *i.e.* the social, political, economical and cultural transformations. The publishing field reflects these important changes and reveals a specific perspective on the future of the post-transition Romania, on its challenges and orientations. The publishing field in post-communist Romania has overcome a "real revolution" (Buluță 1996), when compared to the previous period. Being characterised by a strong adaptation of the offer to the request, the prevailing of the private initiative and a series of important transformations like the quantitative outburst of production and consumption, the diversification of the publishing offer to the detriment of the runs, the strong concentration and polarization of production and of the publishing field in general, the analysis of this "revolution" reveals the presence of the laws of the market economy in play, as well as the Western publishing model.

In the third chapter we study the publishing policies practiced in post-communist Romania, according to a selection of six publishing houses active in the concerned period: Humanitas, Institutul European, Nemira, Polirom, Curtea Veche and Paralela 45. The emphasis is on the collections, the publishing domains and, in general, on the role(s) played by translation in the overall conception of each publisher's catalogue and its publishing policy.

The last chapter is devoted to the analysis of the internationalization of the Romanian publishing field and the contribution that translation has had in this respect. Translation is acknowledged in relation to the post-communist society and the latter's general opening which was initiated with the fall of communism. For this, we emphasise the results of the six case studies and the way in which the publishing logics reflect the transformations overcome by the society in its process of democratisation, of circulation of ideas and cultural goods. Further on are revealed the synchronising mechanisms with the international book field: the dynamics of consumption which had an important impact on the publishing policies, amongst which the predominance of the strategies focused on sales, etc. We end this chapter with an

interrogation on the relation between national identity and (publishing) globalisation, two issues which are often considered antinomian. Questions are raised on the relation between translation and autochthonous creation, as well as the perspective of exporting translations and their function in the globalising and globalised space of the international book field.

From a temporal perspective and taking into account the transformations that took place in Romania after the fall of communism, we identify three major periods, each of them being related to a socio-cultural and an economic turn which marked the post-communist transition. Thus, there is firstly a *time of recovery*, between 1990 and 1995, defined by an effort to follow the appropriate path towards democracy and the country's modernisation, a tempestuous period characterised by continuity and, at the same time, discontinuity, breaking-off. This is reflected in a rich, yet chaotic translation practice which aimed at recovering the deficiencies cumulated in the past and thus following the path of synchronisation with the contemporary publishing trends. Afterwards, there is a *time of reconstruction and stabilising*, between 1996 and 2003, when the country initiated a series of core changes and thus started to find its way in the plural options and perspectives which had opened up. From the publishing field's point of view, after the market had been saturated during the first period, which resulted in runs having seriously diminished, while catalogues were strongly and constantly diversified, the publishing houses started to redefine their own position within the field. They came up with strategies that aimed at legitimising the cultural capital and the discovering of new issues, thus trying to surprise and, at the same time to secure the loyalty of their readers. The perspective of the integration in the European Union and the continuous development of the country's publishing and cultural structures opened a third stage of the post-communist transition, namely a *time of synchronisation*, between 2004 and 2007, when Romania adopted the European model. This period is the most striking for the internationalisation process of the publishing production, where translation played the role of a privileged vehicle for the importation of ideas, of cultural and symbolic capital.

With the fall of communism, Romania underwent a general opening of perspectives and references, which re-inserted the national culture on the international exchange circuit of values and ideas where she had vanished from, during the previous years of the communist era. This was made possible notably through a political policy adapted, on the one hand, to the country's new development conditions and, on the other hand, to the challenges of globalisation. Translation is one of the signs of the internationalisation of the Romanian cultural policy that aims at joining the intercultural dialogue which began with the fall of the

dictatorial system and the subsequent modernisation process of communication and consumption.

By studying the impact that translations have had on the development of the post-communist Romanian society and namely their cultural background, our research aims at contributing, through the investigated theme, as well as the accompanying methodology, to the current debate on the transformations that took place after the fall of communism in the Eastern European societies. Amongst the advantages of the analysis of translation as social practice, made from the perspective of the target culture as observation point, is the fact that it sheds light on the relation between culture, translation and society within given historical conditions.

The modernising process of the Romanian culture reveals an important national dimension which acquires international accents, in the context of joining the trans-national dialogue between languages and cultures. The concept of culture has developed according to three paradigms which we studied in the first chapter of our research: the building of the Romanian people's national feeling and self-consciousness, the opening of perspectives and the relation to the Western modernity and, eventually, the (temporary) transformation in an ideological tool in the hands of the dictatorial regime. The emancipation of Romania occurred through a cultural awakening oriented towards its adjustment on the trends of the modern culture. The publishing models are part of a national reconstruction programme, at different levels: political, social, economical and cultural, with the main objective being the rapid synchronisation with the modern culture. In this ferment of the cultural life, translation as form of imitation, of assimilation and of importation of ideas has always been part of the effort of building and enriching the literary language and the modern Romanian culture. Translations in the first half of the 19th century had a bivalent function of examples and stimuli, enlightenments and catalysts (Cornea 1966: 70), having thus integrated the originality of the national spirit. They were the echoes of an era which had become more and more aware of the need to join the trans-national dialogue of values and ideas.

In this new social and cultural context, an outburst of information occurred that paved the way to a rich translation activity. This abundance of translated books reminds of a similar phenomenon that took place during the 30's. In fact, one can make multiple connections between the interwar and the post-communist eras. The numerous translations, though most of them chaotic, lacking a coherent programme which explain the selection process, the publishing logic based on rather commercial criteria (Ionescu 1981: 35) and, in general, the mercenary interests of the trading publishers can very well apply to the post-communist

publishing field, especially in its early years when the accumulation of information prevailed. If during communism culture had as main task to support the political regime, the fall of the dictatorship caused the disappearance of the back-up mechanisms for the production and distribution of cultural works. The state's protectionism having been removed, it was the logic of free and competitive market that took the lead.

In the context of the development of the country's institutional, cultural and political structures after 1989, translation in the post-communist society has become a common practice, an important constituent part of the Romanian cultural policy, an effective tool for exporting autochthonous cultural capital and importing foreign capital. The cultural mission, the didactic task reminding the (ethical and programmatic) high standard of the publishing profession related to the education of the public taste were challenged by the expectations and the requests of the consumption society and its public, resulting in a continuous adaptation to the profile of the so called "consumer" readers. Translation in post-communist Romania has assumed a social, economic and cultural mission, acting as a vehicle for the circulation of ideas and cultural goods within the globalising and globalised field of knowledge.

The evolution of the publishing domain is directly influenced by the economic, social and cultural mechanisms, on the one hand, and the trends of the international market of cultural goods, on the other hand. Built on a strong tradition that represents a central feature of the Romanian modern culture, translation has proven to be an important tool for importing and thus disseminating ideas coming from foreign cultures, aiming at enhancing the cultural capital and reconnecting the Romanian culture to the international context of the flows of ideas and values.

After 1989, Romanian publishing houses used translation as a strategy of accumulation, of recognition and, finally, of (re-)synchronisation of the symbolic and cultural capital thus produced through the transfer of knowledge, as shown in the conclusions of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the six case studies presented in our research. Translation as vehicle for the cultural, symbolic and economic capital has enhanced the internationalisation of the publishing field through which the Romanian culture has gradually been (re-)integrated in the international circuit of cultural goods and ideas. After a stabilising period, the Romanian publishing houses started to adopt the logic of the international book market, dominated by mechanisms targeted on the profitability of books seen as commercial objects, endowed with commercial value: sales, runs, publishing genres oriented on specific segments of readers (women, teenagers), associating literature and cinema to advertise international blockbusters and thus create publishing events, and so on.

The analysis of the published collections, series, domains, authors and translated languages shows that the project of the post-communist Romanian society is defined, on the one hand, by a rapid process of catching-up with developed societies and thus reducing the cultural gap formed by almost five decades of isolation. On the other hand, it reflects the alignment of the cultural production on the contemporary trends of the international book market. This project shows the important contribution that translation, as in-transfer of cultural capital, has had in the development of the free society, by opening its doors towards new reference systems and values.

The Romanian publishing field has overcome a revolution even more dramatic than the one which occurred at political level (Pennel 2006). The power of ideas has resuscitated the book production in Romania, enhancing thus the readers' access to the national and world literature and to the intellectual heritage, therefore inviting the formers to continuously (re)discover them. The confrontation, the contact between the autochthonous and the foreign literature represents a validating form of specificity. In this context of plural dialogue generating a competitive atmosphere, isolation would be a form of suffocation, of asphyxia through hermetisation (Ionescu 1981: 19). Translation has a two-folded task: on the one hand to receive the transferred cultural capital and, on the other hand, to stimulate the indigenous creation. Otherwise said, it reveals the assimilation of the target culture and the reinvestment of the acquired cultural and symbolic capital in the autochthonous production (Ionescu idem 16). We can therefore conclude that the evolution of the post-communist transition and the evolution of the post-communist cultural field, of the publishing field and the overall translation phenomenon follow the same directions and trends, in a relation of interdependence, of mutual and radiant influence.

The publishing field is one of the achievements of the post-communist Romania (Pennel 2006) which continues to instil ideas and thus contribute at the synchronisation of the Romanian books on the international market of ideas, as well as at the Romanian culture taking part in the development of the European and world cultural capital.

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