GIDEON TOURY

"The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation"

1. Author information

Gideon Toury is a professor of poetics, comparative literature and translation studies at Tel Aviv University. He is also the founder and General Editor of *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies*, as well as General Editor of Benjamins Translation Library. As far as Toury's publications are concerned, he has published three books on translation theory (*Translational Norms and Literary Translation into Hebrew*, *In Search of a Theory of Translation* and *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*) and numerous edited volumes and articles (both in English and Hebrew) concentrated on translation theory and comparative literature.

2. Abstract

Toury starts his article with a thesis that the acquisition of a set of norms is essential for becoming a translator within a cultural environment, so that the translator is able to express the thoughts appropriately, and manoeuvre between potential constraints. It is said that norms determine the equivalence manifested by actual translations. According to Toury, in socio-cultural dimensions, translation is influenced by many types and degrees of constraints. What is more, he claims that since cognition is so influenced, translators working under different conditions use different strategies.

As far as constraints are concerned, they can be described using a scale with two extremes: rules and idiosyncrasies. Norms are placed between these two, so they form a graded

continuum: some are stronger and closer to norms, while the weaker ones – to idiosyncrasies. Norms are believed to specify what is tolerated and allowed in a certain behavioural dimension, ensure the retention of social order and are acquired by each person during his or her socialisation. This is why translation involves at least two sets of norm-systems when it concerns at least two languages. According to Toury, there are two larger groups of norms concerning translation: preliminary and operational. There is also another division he mentions: (1) basic (primary) norms, (2) secondary norms or tendencies and (3) tolerated (permitted) behaviour (and a special group detachable from the third one – (3′) symptomatic devices).

To conclude, Toury states that the art of translation involves a set of norms as well as the translator's intuition and alertness in adjusting his or her choice to the context.

3. Terminology

The terms that are necessary in order to better understand the contents:

Source text term	Meaning	Term in Polish
behaviour	Decision made by the translator in a translation process ?	zachowanie/postępowanie tłumacza ?
conformity	Behaviour that follows the standards that are expected in the process of translation	zgodność z normami?
heterogeneous	Consisting of parts or things that are very different from each other	heterogeniczny
homogenous	Consisting of parts which are similar to each other or are of the same type	homogeniczny
idiosyncrasies	Peculiarities; behaviour or the way of thinking peculiar to a person?	idiosynkrazja
interference	Transfer of elements from one culture/language to another	przenikanie / interferencja

4. Methodology

Toury's paper is based on his own observations and analyses of the texts he refers to. He analyses information together with the reader, sharing his own opinions and reaching a conclusion along with the reader. Firstly, he explains where the norms are placed in the whole process of translation. Then, he analyses different types of norms and their degree, to finally conclude that in the process of decision-making, aside from norms, the translator's intuition and experience are important as well.

5. Links with other publications on the subject

Bartsch, R. 1987. *Norms of Language*. London: Longman.

Even-Zohar, I. 1975. "Decisions in Translating Poetry". *Ha-Sifrut*. 21: 32–45 (Hebrew).

Hermans, T. 1991. "Translational norms and correct translations", in: Kitty M. van Leuven-Zwart and Ton Naaijkens (eds.), *Translation Studies: The State of the Art*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 155–69.

Toury, G. 1980 "Equivalence and Non-equivalence as a Function of Norms", in: Gideon Toury, *In Search of a Theory of Translation*. Tel Aviv: The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University. 63-71.

Wexler, P. N. 1974. *Purism and Language: A Study in Modern Ukrainian and Belorussian Nationalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

http://tau.ac.il/~itamarez/works/books/ez-pss1990.pdf (retrieved 28th Nov 2011)

6. Critical commentary

The article touches upon an important translational issue i.e. norms in translation. Translation deals with real-life situations that are too complex to be totally regulated by norms. This is why we cannot expect the translator's behaviour to be fully systematic, because his or her decision-making may be differently motivated while encountering different problems as well as encountering the same problem throughout the whole text. However, norms are essential in more schematic or technical texts or, simply, to establish general basics on how to deal with translation. Certainly, they will never regulate the art of translation totally, because even the simplest word from the translational point of view may turn out to be problematic in a different context and therefore the translator's intuition and alertness are essential. Nevertheless, the translator should be aware of the existing norms and stick to them to the extent the context allows them.

7. Quotation to remember the text by

"(…) being a translator cannot be reduced to the mere generation of utterances which would be considered "translations" within any of these disciplines. Translation activities should rather be regarded as having cultural significance" (Toury 1978: 198).

"(…) it is norms that determine the (type and extent of) equivalence manifested by actual translations" (Toury 1978: 204).

"(…) we must be content with our intuitions, which, being based on knowledge and previous experience, are "learned" ones, and use them as keys for selecting corpuses and for hitting upon ideas" (Toury 1978: 210).

8. References

Toury, G. 1978. "The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation", in: Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*. London. New York: Routledge. 198–211.

http://www.tau.ac.il/~toury/ (retrieved 28th Nov 2011)

http://dictionary.cambridge.org/