Translation Pertinent Textual Analysis in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

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Abstract: *The theme of this paper is to explore the effects of the African American cultural identity in the translation of literary prose texts. Due to the growing level of worldwide globalisation, identity has emerged as important issues in public and political debate and the translation of literature plays an important role in transferring cultural heritage across boundaries. Identity in literature highlights differences between cultures and authors deliberately emphasis on identity in their manner of writing. As an effect of technical translation problems arise in terms of style in written literary texts.*
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I. Introduction

The important aspect of style in translation is that the author of a certain text has made specific expressional choices to achieve a certain linguistic or aesthetic effect. As Leech and Short mention, style "refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on" (9). In the field of translation, it is usual to look at a text by focusing on the specific use of language in terms of stylistic effects. It is the possible option to transfer these effects into the target language by using the means that are made available to the translator in the target language. Evidently, thinking of style as "the linguistic characteristics of a particular text" will be the most lucrative way of gaining a better understanding of a text (Leech & Short 9). It is the first step in the translation process.

Toni Morrison's novel *Jazz* extensively concentrates on the idea of the American African culture. Toni Morrison's use of specific characteristics effects help to strengthen the aesthetic effect of Jazz literature in this African American novel by means of describing the situational development of this minority group. This aim of this paper is to describe the specific effects of the most important stylistic aspects on the content novel. It also finds out what the possible and most suitable solutions are to these problems.

Michael Cronin uses the modern idea of "cosmopolitanism" to discuss the phenomenon of identity in relation to translation. Cronin applies multiple definitions to explain the concept of cosmopolitanism, but only two of these definitions apply to "cultural cosmopolitanism". The first one is that a person has the ability to connect with people in other cultures who speak different languages. The other definition beholds that human have multiplicity of different way in which they can be defined of described. This relates to the ideas of Steph Lawler:

People might find themselves primarily defined… by their age or their gender or their social class or their ethnicity, or by the neighbourhood in which they live, or by a combination of these different forms of belonging. In this view, cosmopolitanism is a way of thinking through the coplexity of a polyidentity rather than accepting single, all-encompassing identities for human subject based on one variable alone (Cronin 10).

Sherry Simon mentions in *Gender in Translation* that cultural studies help to understand the complexities of culture in translation. He mentions that translation of identity has to do with shifting boundaries of difference in language between local and global forms of expression that derive from cultural differences. According to Simon, "a real translation can only come about when the translator understands the way in which a language is tied to local realities and changing identities" (Simon 138). The passage from one location to another always involves changes and displacements in the relationship between both languages, because there is no total equivalence between the cultural systems of the source and target text. Simon claims that, translators must make decisions about the cultural meanings a language carries and evaluate the degree to which the source and target culture are equivalent. This process of meaning transfer often has more to do with reconstructing the value of meaning than finding the cultural inscription of a term. This relates to the idea of Spivak as Simon quoted:

Real translation can only come about if the jagged relationship between rhetoric and logic, condition and effect of knowing are reconstructed in the other language (Simon 143).

Translation has been viewed as a process of mapping theoretical structures of the source language into the target language. The translator's perception of the source text determines how reality is projected into another language. Sidiropoulou claims that, "the process of translation starts with the translator who has to gain

a proper understanding of the source culture in order to grasp the meaning of the text and the next step is to determine the differences between the source and target culture" (148). Then the translator has to transfer the meaning of the source text into the target text by overcoming the linguistic differences between the two languages, "the purpose being survival of cultural and national identities" (Sidiropoulou 148). Carol Maier talks about the situation in which translators learn that certain categories with which people identity are constructed rather than universal and are often relative to the language and culture within which the terms are embedded. For the act of communicating the foreign, the translator needs to be inventive in finding the right words to convey meaning, by using loan words, calque or renderings from existing translations.

The importance of translating African American literature cannot be disassociated form the persistence of original languages and identities. The representation of their identity depends on their speech patterns, complex narrative structures and metaphorical use of language, as is the case in *Jazz*. Adejunmobi quoted Venuti when he says that "foreignisation translation signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language" (169). In many cases this disruption will not have a negative effect on the reader; however, in some case the translator has no choice but to choose domestication because the foreign elements disrupt the fluency of the translation.

The use of African American terminology in *Jazz* poses another problem for the translator. *Jazz* consists of many slang constructions, such as **juke joints, barrel hooch** and **tonk house**. In the text these terms follow each other in a sentences and they are all adjectives belonging to the noun **music, "**but it did not make her feel generous, this juke joint, barrel hooch, tonk house music" (Morrison 59). These are existing compounds and explanations are available online. A **juke join** is a barrelhouse for plantation workers, **barrel hooch** is a cheap drinking establishment and **tonk house** is a cheap noisy bar. They pose a problem for the translator, because he has to choose among several options as there are no equivalent terms at hand in the target language. One solution might be that the translator decides to replace the terms by their full explanations. In the translation of *Jazz* this solution might work well because all three terms have almost same meaning.

The effect is that the reader will never know the meaning of the terms and this in itself causes a reading obstruction. This solution does work well with other cultural specific elements, such as **Fifth Avenue, Edgecomb** and **Panama**. The cultural specific element **Fifth Avenue** is the street located in a very posh shopping area where Alice Manfred and Dorcas are watching the march outside on the pavement. However, this strategy of bringing the story to the target culture setting does not work well for *Jazz*, because it is important for the preservation of the African American identity that the setting remains in America. In this case the most obvious solution would be to adopt the foreign element, even when that means the reader will probably never know the meaning of the location.

Another example of cultural specific elements are the names of newspapers and magazines that Felice talks about when she mentions the fact that she used to stack all the newspapers and magazines for her dad when she was young girl: *"The Amsterdam, the Age, The Crisis, The Messenger, the Worker"* (Morrison 199). Some of these newspapers or magazines were published especially for African American people (*The Crisis* is the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP in short). The translator has the option to translate the names to non-existing Dutch equivalents: *De Ammsterdammer, de Eeuw, De Crisis, De Boodschapper en de Werker*. The problem is that these non-existing names might cause confusion with the reader as he is confronted with meaningless names. Another option is to translate the names into Dutch newspapers: De Volkskrant, De Telegraaf, het NRC, BN De stem en het Parool. The problem here is that these newspapers do not have a connection to African American history. In fact, this is just a list of all the major Dutch newspapers.

II. Conclusion

The last and most preferable option is to keep the foreign names in the translation. Even though the original names may not transfer the meaning directly, it is a sign to the reader that the appearance of these names in the text behold an underlying meaning. For every African American term, the translator has to choose between the options discussed here. The choice for the most suitable solution completely depends on the purpose of the text within its target culture.

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