

The Relationship between Prose, Poetry and Drama Translation as concerns Foreignization and Domestication

Constantin Ngoran

Abstract: Since the beginning of translation practice in about 300 BC (Horguelin, 1982), foreignization and domestication (understood simply as source-text and target-text-oriented translation respectively) have often been used as translation strategies, notably in the translation of prose, poetry and drama. More often than not, they have been prescribed, and sometimes used as though they were or are mutually exclusive; that is to say the use of one excludes the use of the other. However, over the more than two millennia of a mixture of translation practice and theory, these somehow standard translation strategies have always been used mutually and complementarily, either consciously or unconsciously. In other words, for all types of translation, whether specialized or general, their use has always been shared to varying degrees. This otherwise means that there is and there has always been some proportional relationship or interaction between foreignization and domestication as far as every translation type is concerned. This paper sets out to examine this relationship or interaction by presenting part of the findings of a study of the use of foreignization and domestication as translation strategies in prose, poetry and drama. More specifically, the study examined foreignization and domestication as used in the English translations of Ferdinand Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* (prose), Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (poetry) and Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* (drama). This study was within the purview of my doctoral thesis on *Creativity in Prose, Poetry and Drama Translation*.

Keywords: Prose, Poetry and Drama Translation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of translation practice in about 300 BC (Horguelin, 1982), foreignization and domestication (understood simply as source-text and target-text-oriented translation respectively) have often been used as translation strategies, notably in the translation of prose, poetry and drama. More often than not, they have been prescribed, and sometimes used as though they were or are mutually exclusive; that is to say the use of one excludes the use of the other. However, over the more than two millennia of a mixture of translation practice and theory, these somehow standard translation strategies have always been used mutually and complementarily, either consciously or unconsciously. In other words, for all types of translation, whether specialized or general, their use has always been shared to varying degrees. This otherwise means that there is and there has always been some proportional relationship or interaction between foreignization and domestication as far as every translation type is concerned. This paper sets out to examine this relationship or interaction by presenting part of the findings of a study of the use of foreignization and domestication as translation strategies in prose, poetry and drama. This study was within the purview of my doctoral thesis on *Creativity in Prose, Poetry and Drama Translation*. More specifically, the study examined foreignization and domestication as used in the English translations of Ferdinand Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* (prose), Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (poetry) and Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* (drama). Let us begin by defining the key terms, namely foreignization, domestication, prose, poetry, drama, prose translation, poetry translation and drama translation before presenting the said findings. However, these findings will be preceded by a brief discussion of the specificities or peculiarities of poetry and drama translation.

2. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Prose

According to Webster's, (cited by Tangyie and Chong, 2003:9), prose is defined as follows:

A literary medium distinguished from poetry especially in its greater regularity and variety of rhythm and its closer correspondence to the patterns of everyday speech.

There are five main forms of prose, namely, allegory, autobiography, biography, picaresque and fable. Allegory is prose in which characters, actions and setting represent abstract or moral qualities. For instance, in John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*, characters such as Christian, Worldly, Wiseman and Despair stand for qualities. An autobiography is a person's account of his or her own life. Biography is a detailed account of a person's life by another person. Picaresque refers to the nature of the subject matter as well as the superficial or autobiographical or prosodic features. Finally, fable is a brief story in verse or prose in which human situations and behaviour are depicted through (chiefly) beasts and birds, or gods or inanimate objects (Tangyie and Chong, 2003:11-12) There are four main types of prose forms of discourse. These are narrative prose, descriptive prose, argumentative prose and expository or informative prose. Narrative prose aims at telling a story, which may be true or false, in an interesting way as possible. It tactfully narrates events in order that they may be interesting. Descriptive prose, for its part, provides details of either general or specific features of people, places, events and experience. Argumentative prose is concerned with providing cogent argument and logic in order to convince the reader on a point or points. It often makes use of comparisons, illustrations, associations, quotations and contrast in a bid to strengthen proof or evidence. Finally, there is expository or informative prose which sets out to present information, giving or explaining related facts and ideas. Apart from these four, main types of prose forms of discourse, we also have emotive or expressive prose, which deals with the use of language to give information, while attempting to influence the reader's attitude and emotions. It could be further split into discursive and contemplative prose. The first, discursive prose is mostly used by philosophers, theologians and politicians. It is writing that appeals to the intellect, through the use of convincing arguments and ideas. The second, contemplative prose comprises essays or treatises on any subject. It usually deals with reflective ideas on a particular issue. (Idem, pp.12-14)

Poetry

Babette and Deutsch (cited by Tangyie and Chong, 2003:134), define poetry as follows:

The art which uses words as both speech and song to reveal the realities that the senses record, the feelings salute, the mind perceives and the shaping imagination orders.

In other words, poetry is the rhythmic, elevated and felicitous use of language in verse form.

Drama

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1973) succinctly defines drama as follows:

A composition in prose or verse, adapted to be acted on the stage, in a story related by means of dialogue and action, and is represented with accompanying gesture, costume and scenery (p.603)

It is perhaps important to state here that, as far as translation is concerned, we are dealing with or talking about the drama text or script as it is written

Foreignization

This is a translation strategy in which there is 'close adherence to the source text structure and syntax' (Munday, 2001, p. 147) In other words, it is source-text-oriented translation, which gives priority to adequacy, at the expense of appropriacy and acceptability. It is more or less literal translation.

Domestication

According to Venuti,(1995,cited by M;unday,2001,p.146),domestication is a translation strategy which ‘entails translating in a transparent, fluent, invisible style’ in order to minimize the foreignness of the target text.’ It is target-text-oriented translation with focus on the respect of target text norms. In Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995) terminology, it is appropriate and acceptable translation.

Prose, Poetry and Drama Translation

In order to compensate for the round definitions, which will be given, to the above terms, let us first adopt the definition of translation as given by Nida and Taber(1969).We believe that their definition of translation is so far the best. The two scholars assert that ‘translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style’.Prose,podetry and drama translation can thus be respectively defined simply as the translation of prose, poetry and drama works or texts.

Peculiarities relating to Poetry Translation

Poetry, which is believed to be the highest level of literary expression, is as difficult in its understanding as in its translation. In fact, ‘the translation of poetry is generally held to be the most difficult, demanding, form of translation (Connolly, 2001:176; cited in Baker(ed), 2001:176). Although poetry translation has been done since the beginning of translation practice, some scholars still believe, more or less, that it is impossible. Such scholars include Nibokov(1955:515), Robert Browning (in Selver, 1966:26), Roman Jakobson (1959:238) and Shelley (in Honig, 1985:7) (All the four scholars are cited by Connolly in Baker, 2001:175). In spite of this belief in the impossibility of poetry translation, practice of the latter continued to thrive over the years. However, the approaches to this practice were varied and contradictory, as there was no unified theoretical basis to guide practice. Every translator-poet or poet-translator had his or her strategies or approaches in doing their poetry translation. Very often, and as if to apologize for the shortcomings of their poetry renderings, practicing translators tended to state the specific problems they had and how they attempted to solve them. While some were generally literal in their translation approaches, others were liberal or free. Extremist proponents of literal translation went for word- for-word translation and extremist proponents of free translation translated poetry using prose.

Though there is yet no unified strategy or theory to guide poetry translation, Holmes (1988:22), cited by Connolly in Baker, 2001:174) identifies the following four strategies for the translation of verse forms:

- (a) *memetic*, where the original form is retained.
- (b) *analogical*, where a culturally corresponding form is used.
- (c) *organic*, where the semantic material is allowed to take on its own unique poetic shape as the translation develops.
- (d) *deviant or extraneous*, where the form adopted is in no way implicit in either the form or content of the original.

It should be noted here that ‘the choice of strategy... is itself a reflection of target language norms and the preferences of a particular cultural community at a particular point in time’(Connolly in Baker, 2001:174). In a relevant and powerful statement at the end of his paper,he asserts:

If artistic ability is needed to produce an original poem,then a very simiar artistic gift is required in translating it,and the names of original poets and their translators are therefore frequently linked to the literature .
Despite the traditional views of the translator of poetry as a secondary or failed poet feeding on the achievements of others,it is widely recognized that poetry translators are highly gifted ,for they... ‘must perform some(but not all) of the functions of the poet,and some functions not normally required of critic or poet’(Holmes, 1985:11)

Finally, apart from the obligation to convey the message embedded in the original poem to the target or translated poem, the poetry translator is equally bound to grapple with rendering, as far as possible, the structure, rhyme scheme, rhythm, poetic images and effect of the original in the target poem.

Peculiarities relating to Drama Translation

Unlike prose and poetry translation, 'only limited scholarly attention has hitherto been devoted to the translation of drama' and contrary to 'the translation of a novel or a poem, the duality inherent in the art of the theatre requires language to combine with spectacle, manifested through visual as well as acoustic images' (Anderman, Gunilla in Baker, 2001:74)

In the translation of the drama text, the translator's choice of words, phrases and sentences is determined by speak ability, performability and acceptability. As concerns speakability, the translator should try to know whether the words, phrases or sentences can be pronounced or spoken with enough fluency to convincingly pass on the message to the audience in as much an interesting tone or way as possible. In other words, words, phrases and sentences must not be pronounced or spoken in a way that would make the play boring on stage. Suspense must be kept alive by the way the actors talk. Relating to speakability, a play must be written such that it can be acted. Again, this will depend on the choice of words as well as the events described by the words. This means that a play must or should be 'actable'. Acceptability refers to whether the play, when acted, would be well received or rejected by the target audience. This may largely depend on the socio-cultural similarities or differences between the source and target drama texts. If there are wide socio-cultural differences in this case, the target drama text should be adjusted to suit the target audience. This may involve shelving some words and phrases that may be taboo to the target audience and adjusting the dialect, style and register where possible. Very often, cultural and linguistic adjustments in drama translation result in what some translators prefer to call adaptation, rather than translation. Apart from the traditional consideration of performability and speakability, Suh (2009 pp.:121-133) contends that:

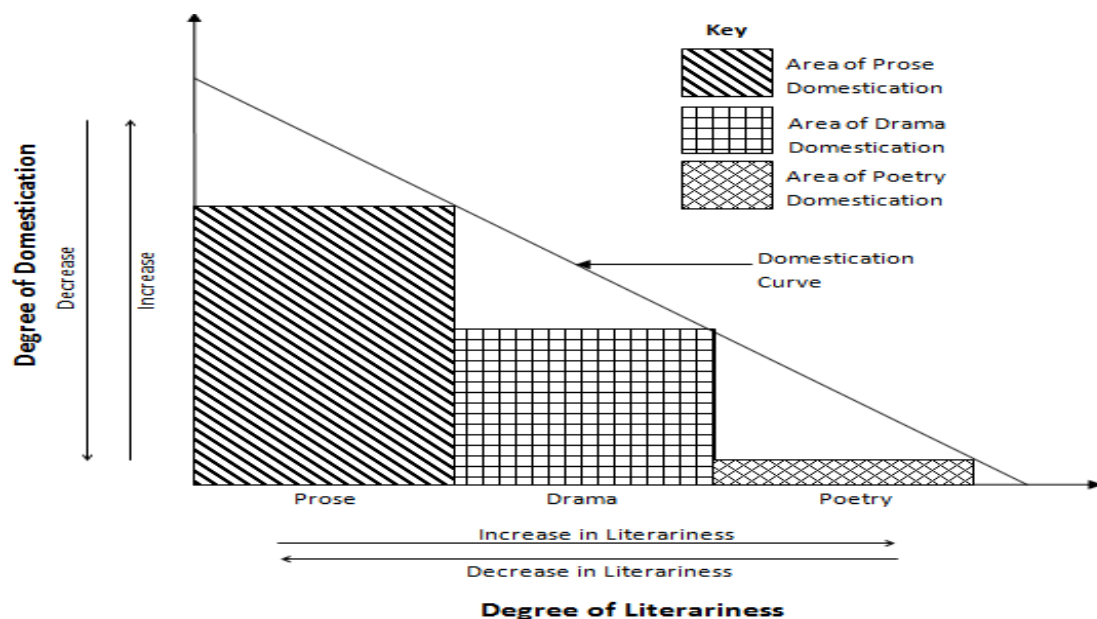
the distinctive characteristic of the drama text as an incomplete entity is fundamental and central to this genre (drama) and ought to be sufficiently highlighted by drama translation scholars and equally placed at the centre of the debate in the same stead as performability and speak ability.

Relationship Between Prose, Drama and Poetry Translation as

Regards the Concepts of Foreignization and Domestication

The following graphs, with their accompanying explanations, attempt showing the above relationship and its implications:

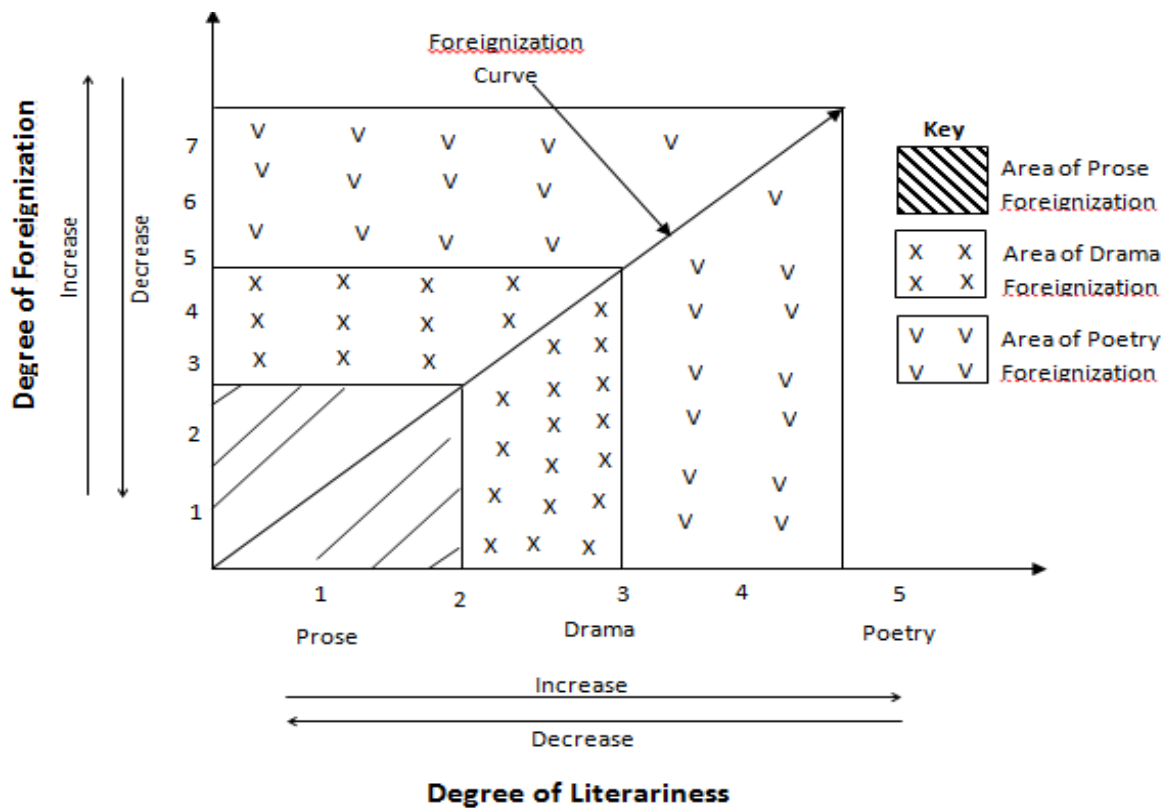
Graph 1: Literariness against Domestication



Graph 1: The more the literariness (that is, moving from prose through Drama to Poetry), the less the domestication; and the less the literariness (that is moving down from poetry through drama to prose), the more the domestication.

Similarly, the more the domestication, the less the literariness and the less the Domestication, the more the literariness.

Graph 2: Literariness against Foreignization



Graph 2: The more the literariness, the more the foreignization and the less the literariness, the less the foreignization. Similarly, the more the foreignization, the more the literariness and the less the foreignization, the less the literariness.

Summarily, graphs 1 and 2 above indicate as follows. In prose translation domestication is used more than foreignization. Drama translation, for its part, appears, like prose translation, to use domestication more than foreignization, but to a lesser degree. Contrary to both prose and drama translation, poetry translation employs much more of foreignization than domestication. All in all, it is a matter of degree since all three literary translation types use the two strategies. The implication here for translators in general and literary translators in particular is that they can readily know beforehand the translation strategy that they have to use more when faced with any literary translation exercise. This means that, depending on the literary genre, they will know on which translation strategy to focus, without neglecting the other strategy.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to establish the relation between prose, poetry and drama translation as regards foreignization and domestication by presenting part findings of a study of the use of foreignization and domestication as translation strategies in prose, poetry and drama. More specifically, the study examined foreignization and domestication as used in the English translations of Ferdinand Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* (prose), Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*

(poetry) and Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* (drama). A relationship was found between prose, drama and poetry translation as regards foreignization and domestication. It was found out that in poetry translation, the translators used the foreignization strategy much more than they used the domestication strategy. It was equally observed that, unlike in poetry translation, prose and drama translation used more of the domestication strategy than foreignization. However, it was noticed that prose translation used more domestication and less foreignization than drama translation. Assuming that

poetry is the highest form of literary expression and that it is followed by drama and prose in descending order of literary expression, the study draws the following conclusion: The higher the literary form of a text, the more the foreignization strategy will be needed in its translation and the lower the literary form of a text, the more domestication will be needed or used as a translation strategy. It was further concluded that the use of either foreignization or domestication as a translation strategy was just a matter of proportion or degree. Often, it was discovered that the two strategies were used, but to varying degrees, depending on the literary form and level of literariness or literary expressiveness. A graphical representation of the relationship between prose, drama and poetry translation as regards foreignization and domestication was given for more clarity.

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