Translation: The world’s language

Byron Pissalidis
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

I deeply believe that language is the most significant expression of people’s thinking; but we must admit that it is always colored by personal history, spiritual and cultural development.

Only the translator faces the charming task of conveying to another culture(TL) the intricate forms of the source language. But to do that in an accurate form would require a great number of footnotes, a process that will finally make the translation unreadable for the average reader.

The translator must give a hard try to convey, to bridge the meaning and thought of SL with that of the TL and its cultural background, which cannot be done ideally.

Translation is a path for cultural interpretation. Translators are often advised to perceive language not as a high security prison from which they are always planning to escape to some uncertain linguistic no-man’s land, but rather as a key for opening the door. When we translate we must always remember the reflections of the reading traces left in the back side of our mind.

The viewing through these traces is unlimited.

Translator’s task is not to imagine (that’s the writer’s task) but to perceive the artistic recreation of a text. The artistic recreation, the translation, is to be achieved through submission to something that is already there. That very same ritual is followed by a good translator.

He must first lose and then gain his identity, submerge himself or herself completely in the writer’s experience, and at the same time maintain his/her very personality. That’s a truly demanding task, that cannot be correctly performed unless writer and translator are regarded as creatures of the same universe, possessing the same sensibilities and most of all, moving in common rhythms which come from the depths of their unconscious.

Still, language also consists of sounds, that are mainly different and individual in each writer. A narrator of prose will talk to us in his very own voice. On the other hand, a poet, a dramatist will use another type of voice. Each one of the creators mentioned above, has transformed-translated his/her very voice into literature. And the most important role for a translator can be found in his/her perception of the different and individual literary voice, in the writer’s work which has to be translated. The person who’s a writer is likely to translate better a literary text than someone who doesn’t originally write. Translators are the patient, hardworking researchers who write and re-write a sentence many times in order to reach whatever
dream they have in their mind about that particular or every little sentence. This kind of research can be called creation.

On the other hand many poets, who translate literary texts from a target language to source language, are trying to cut a great deal of their originality by using an analytical and perifrastical form of language in them. Why? Maybe because they don’t want to overestimate the poet and his original literary work and blur their very own poet-translator’s star (The Ungaretti’s poetical translation by O. Elytis).

Some of us probably recall the work done by two Italian writers, C. Pavese (H. Melville’s Moby Dick in 1933) and E. Vittorini (American Anthology in 1942), who created American literature for Italian readers, through their original literary works as well as their translations and in extension a new generation of writers and a brand new consciousness of the Italian readers towards literature.

The translator as a creator can only be such, if he/she constantly sticks in his/her knowledge, his/her very perception of words.

I am going to give you an idea of doing literary translation.

First we are going to hear the poem in Greek and then in Italian translation. All the translations are made by the author of the paper: In Greek.

Αλέξης Ασλάνογλου

Θέλω λυπητερά τραγούδια

Θέλω λυπητερά τραγούδια καλοκαιρί μου
καφτό σακατεμένο μου διαμάντι
γυμνό κορμί της θάλασσας που ἐπαίξες
χορδές του αέρα μέσα στα μαλλιά μου

Θέλω λυπητερά τραγούδια καλοκαιρί μου
ηλεκτρισμένα μάτια στο σιριγάνι
η μουσική στα σφαιριστήρια της αγάπης
το πυροτέχνημα του ήλιου στη φωνή μου

Κατεδαφίζονται τα καλοκαιριά στη σειρά
όσο παλιώνο

In Italian:

Voglio canzoni dolorosi

Voglio canzoni dolorosi estate mio
diamante mio mutilo scottante
corpo nudo del mare che suanasti
cordi di vento nei capelli miei
Voglio canzoni dolorosi estate mio
occhi eccitati a spasso
la musica nei billiardi dell’amore
fuoco artificiale nella voce mia

E stati che si demoliscono in fila
quanto invecchio

Translators have to query their own language (SL) continually, to examine
again and again the sense, the exact meaning (in the TL) they want to
convey.

The words offer themselves in the course of translation in order for the one
that fits exactly to be found. Therefore, we have a great deal of words in our
own language (SL, Greek) corresponding to the one we have to translate (TL,
Italian), or the opposite or sometimes we have none at all. Let us stick to the
ambiguity of some words in Italian and Greek language which lead us to a
paternalistic type of linguistic image. In Greek, the word παιδί means the
son and also the children of both sexes; the usage is the same in Italian, the
word figlio meaning παιδί in Greek. The word padre in Italian means
πατέρας but also γονεῖς.

This raises the question of which is more important in the course of
translation, accuracy or the flow of the text, imitation or sub-creation. I
believe that both have to be present. We ought to follow the text’s tone in
order to preserve its soul in translation. The translator’s task is likely to be
an instinctive business; it is up to the translator himself/herself to make the
author of the text (SL), sing, scream, cry, laugh, curse, argue in the (TL) AS
HE HAD DONE IN THE ORIGINAL TEXT and this can only be achieved if
the translator stays closely to the text and of course even more closely to
what he was written about.

Let me give you another example of poetry translation from Greek (SL)
into Italian language (TL):

In Greek:

Ἀνέστης Ευαγγέλου

Με μικρά βήματα

Με μικρά βήματα μέσα στη μνήμη περνάς,
μακρινή μουσική, ήχοι ενός άλλου κόσμου,
ω, εσώ αθόρυβη, ανοιχτή πάντοτε πληγή
γι’ αυτούς που εγκατέλειψαν τα σπίτια τους ή τα χάσαν ανεξήγητα
για όσους δεν έχουν που την κεφαλή κλίνει,
καθώς όταν σου ρίχνουν φαρμάκα στο ποτήρι

In Italian:

Voglio canzoni dolorosi estate mio
occhi eccitati a spasso
la musica nei billiardi dell’amore
fuoco artificiale nella voce mia

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και δεν έχεις τη γεύση παρά μόνο για πίκρα,
καθώς ένα παιδί που του αρπάζουν το παιχνίδι του
και το αφήνουν με αδεια χέρια σε μίαν έρημη σάλα—
με μικρά βήματα μέσα στη μύτη περνάς
σταλάζεις ένα σύννεφο στην καρδιά, θολώνεις τη μέρα
tυλίγεις με ομίχλη τα πρόσωπα, παιδεύεις
tα τελευταία που μας έμειναν όνειρα.

In Italian:

A piccoli passi

A piccoli passi nella memoria penetri
musica lontana, echi d’un mondo diverso,
tu piaga silente, sempre aperta
per questi che trascurarono o persero le loro case inesplicabilmente,
per quelli che non hanno dove la testa appogiar,
come nel momento in cui veleno ti versano nel bicchiere
ed assapori solo che l’ amarezza,
come un bambino che gli prendono via il giocatolo
lasciandolo con le mani sgombri in una sala desolata
a piccoli passi nella memoria penetri
far gocciolare una nuvola nel cuore, la giornata anebbi
far avvolgere i visi di nebbia, travagli
gli ultimi sogni nostri che restano.

We should look beyond the common notion of literary translation as a simple process of transforming a language to another, giving the chance to an audience to have access to a text they didn’t previously have. It’s not just a transmitting function, something merely inessential. The differences between languages (TL,SL) are the keys to understand what is meant by each language separately. Their entire relationship can never be absolutely revealed; translation

(in TL) shows a primal representation of a text (in SL), our beginning of understanding its own expression.

Literary translation is the process of maturing of the SL and its rebirth into another, in the TL.

If in literary translation we are dealing with various linguistic differences, we must try to reconcile with them, not to abort them. The stream of our language in a literary text(SL) that is to be translated, shows us also its stream of literary revelation.

But every reader in order to catch the literary revelation must be able to compare between literary texts and their endless signification as well as their differences and similarities in translation.

Let’s focus on the third piece of literary-poetry translation.
In Greek:

Μυρτώ Αναγνωστόπουλου

HMOYN ΕΔΩ

Τῇ μουν εδώ
στο μύθο μου
Κεντούσα τα φτερά μου
Έπινα αμύλητο νερό

Και τα παιδιά μου
σκόρπιζα
σε ανατολή και δύση
ta προκιά μου

In Italian translation:

ERO QUI

Ero qui
nel mito mio
Ricamavo mie ali
Bevevo acqua taciturna

Ed i figli miei
spargavano
all’est ed ovest
le mie doti

Translation is likely to be a way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages; although its goal isn’t a permanent, final, conclusive product of linguistic recreation, but a linguistic procedure that must be revisited again and again.

The translator’s perpetual attempt is purity, to deliver a clear and pure message about the words and the sentences of the literary text of the SL into TL. It is the voyage of the written words (SL) to find their identity in a different linguistic complex (TL).

The translation’s procedure is conceived from literary recreators (translators) of a text as a model for its cultural interpretation. It is well known that language is born from desire; language forces us to express what we want and what we want to possess. But, I deeply believe that translation itself is a way of possessing literature (in SL) physically and
driving it into a new language, into TL and making it accessible to different
people. On the other hand translation is often possessed by literature as
words possess us many times.

Translators are making attempts to find an objective basis for the control
and assessment of the quality of their translated texts. This attempt they may
achieve by presenting the content and parameters of the original text in SL,
by focusing on their knowledge of the linguistic differences between the SL
and TL and by comparing their results with the ideal or potential literary
translation.

In the assessment of the criticism of translation, it is often very difficult to
make comparisons between the translated texts and the original ones. In this
case the assessment is based on the coherence criteria. It is up to us,
translators, if we want to deliver a fresh, modern communicative translation
or a well structured logical semantic one.

The very famous Greek poet George Drosinis mentioned for his literary
translations that «The wine isn’t mine but the glass is». So, when we
translate literature we are trying to shape in another language, its original
flavor.

The translator should primarily have in mind the rhythm and the structure
of the original text and then rewrite it in a form that conveys the style of the
archetype, of the original text.

A good translator must also have some very important qualities, such as
imagination, good taste, judgment, ability to recreate a text from the very
beginning. The source language’s reality is far from its literary
reconstruction of text in target language. There is great difference between
the written colloquial language and the literary language.

Regarding the poetical translation, if it’s not an imitation, a mimesis,
it must be inspired; emphasize on the meaning equivalence and not on
staying close to the original verse.

Now, let me give you one of my translated poems from Greek language as
SL and Italian as target language.

The translation of the poem is made by Daniele Simoncini in Rome, at the
Second University of Tor Vergata.
In original language, Greek:

Βύρων Πισσαλίδης

Το παιδί

Το παιδί ξαρόνει με μανία στο πλευρό σου
και εγώ ποδηλατώ στο ρυθμό της φωνής σου.
Παιρνώ το σάλο σου και του δίνω ζωή
φτίνω το σώμα σου και σου μιλάω.
Το παιδί σταματάει το παιχνίδι
παιρνει ένα μολύβι και το καρφώνει
στη ζεστή από έρωτα σάρκα σου.

In translated language, Italian:

Il bambino

Il bambino carica con malizia il tuo fianco
e io pedalo al ritmo della tua voce.
Prendo il tuo dolore e te lo dono con vita
fabbro al tuo corpo e ti parlo.
Il bambino si ferma a giocare
ha preso un martello e lo锲e
nella calda da amore carne tua.
In Italian translation:

Viron Pissalidis

Il ragazzo
Il ragazzo sta accoccolato smaniamente accanto a te
ed io pedalo nel ritmo della tua voce.
Prendo tua saliva e le do vita
spunto il tuo sangue e ti parlo.
Il ragazzo smette di giocare
prende una matita e la conficca
nel tuo corpo caldo dell’amor

To translate, we must experience the original literary text as an entity not just as a recreation via a different language; be aware that we are dealing with different culture, different echoes and linguistic rhythms. We get in touch with a literary text through linguistic contact and its approach.

When we translate a text from a SL to a TL we also internationalize it, we recycle it by using its structure, nature and sound; we begin with its systematic change of language (of SL) as a means of delivery, of bringing something into light and we finish by giving it the opportunity to be understood (in TL).

Sometimes a literary text will have primarily local or regional tone (dialetti-dialects) in the Italian (SL) which should be present in Greek (TL). In order to save time and trouble, the translator has to recourse to other translations of the same text in different languages or to invent some novel words, close to the SL standards, to convey its impression. Tone in a literary text is open to various interpretations but it’s surely associated with its sound. The preservation of the tone in the translation might be its secret. Literary Translation is the best reading approach; that’s why a literary translator is the most attentive and careful reader of all. The relation mentioned above leads us to a very specific literary significance of the translated words.

As for the literary translations we must admit that their recreators, the translators, topped their best results in a transitional period as poets-creators; and through that experience they managed to redefine and refine their poetical rhythm, form and structure.

Each and every translated poem is an originally recreated one, but also is maintaining certain functions of the archetype.

When we are dealing with poetical texts we are dealing with words. The word is powerful and meaningful; its rhythm too. It also contains partially the emotional motive of a poem. We are focusing merely on its
powerfulness and its emotional sourcefulness than its meaningfulness, because poetry is primarily emotionally loaded rather than rationally oriented.

Translation is likely to be a study of a literary text more than its transformation. There is always a dualismo-dualism in translation; close to the original text language (SL) is to be found a different one, the translated one, close to the original poema-poem is to be found a recreated one, close to the poeta-creatore is to be found a traduttore-creatore; it's obvious that we are dealing with their competitive relationship in the creation or recreation of literature.

When a translator is finished with his/her translated text he/she begins to think of the alternative ways of its translation. He/she is never satisfied with his/her recreation, there is always something missing from it; the same feeling penetrates also the original creator, the artist.

The translation's procedure is a challenge, an invitation to an original text and of course its reception depends on different cultures and civilizations.

A literary text gains different interpretations in the different languages in which it is translated; literature and its reception is based on the world's differentiations. A literary recreation is the transformation of somebody's voice (in SL) in somebody else's linguistic territory (in TL), it is an interactive game of searching and manipulating words properly in order to recreate the fantasy, the dream and the reality of an original literary text.

Now, allow me to give you the fifth and the last piece of translation of Giorgio Gaber's poem, in someone else's linguistic territory, in Greek language as TL. The translation is made by the author of the paper.

In original language, Italian:

Io se fossi dio
Io se fossi dio
(e io potrei anche esserlo, se no non vedo chi)
io se fossi dio non mi farei fregare
dai modi furbetti della gente
non sarei mica un dilettante
sarei sempre presente
sarei davvero in ogni luogo a spirare
meglio ancora a criticare appunto cosa fa la gente.
Per esempio il piccolo borghese, com'e noioso,
non commettere mai peccati grossi,
non e mai intensamente peccaminoso,
dal resto poverino e troppo misero e meschino
e pur sapendo che dio e piu esatto di una sfera
lui pensa che un errore piccolino
non lo conti o non lo veda.
Per questo io se fossi dio
preferirei il secolo passato
se fossi dio rimpiaugerei il furore antico
dove si odiava e poi si amava
e si amazzava il nemico.
Ma io non sono ancora nel regno dei cieli,
sono troppo invischiato nei vostri sfaceli.

In translation, in Greek language:

Εγώ, αν ήμουν θεός

Εγώ, αν ήμουν θεός
(και θα μπορούσα ακόμη να είμαι, αν όχι δεν βλέπω
ποιος άλλος θα μπορούσε)

Εγώ, αν ήμουν θεός
den θα είχα φθάρει από τους πονηρούς τρόπους του
κόσμου
den θα ήμουν καν εραστέχνης, θα ήμουν πάντα παρών,
θα ήμουν πραγματικά πανταχού παρών να παρακολουθώ ή
καλύπτομαι ακόμη
να κριτικάρω ακριβώς τι κάνει ο κόσμος.

Για παράδειγμα, ο μικροσκοτύλης πάντα είναι βαρετός,
den κάνει ποτέ μεγάλα σφάλματα, δεν είναι ποτέ ένοχος.

Κατά τα άλλα είναι πολύ δυστυχημένος ο φουκάρας και
φτωχός και ξέροντας επίσης ότι ο θεός είναι πιο τέλειος και
από μια σφαίρα,
πιστεύει ότι ένα τόσο δα μικρό λαθάκι δεν το μετρά
ή δεν το βλέπει.
Γι' αυτό, εγώ αν ήμουν θεός
θα προτιμούσα τον προηγούμενο αιώνα
αν ήμουν θεός
θα νοσταλγούσα την αρχαία μανία κατά την οποία
πρώτα μισούσε κάποιος και έπειτα αγαπούσε
και σκότωνε τον εχθρό.

Όμως εγώ δεν βρίσκομαι στο βασίλειο των ουρανών
eίμαι πολύ μπλεγμένος στις δικές σας βρομοδουλείες.

If this whole presentation has not proven anything else about the relationship between language and literature, it has certainly proven one thing: that literary translation is the world’s language.
Poets are often teachers, I mean historically and actually; they are teachers about what is possibly certain in the way of genuine speech. Their works are in the hand and in the good intentions of some translators who often mislead that very message. A serious transformation of a text from SL into TL is a fundamental demand on translator’s consciousness, or ought to be.