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The translator as the second author – Ryszard Kapuściński and his translators

Tłumacz jako drugi autor – Ryszard Kapuściński i jego tłumacze

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to examine the extent to which the translator of a particular text is entitled to enter the role of the original author. The case in point is that of Ryszard Kapuściński, the Polish journalist and writer, and his translators into numerous foreign languages, whose experiences concerning the translation act have been described in a compilation *Podróże z Ryszardem Kapuścińskim* (Journeys with Ryszard Kapuściński)¹ by Bożena Dudko (2007). The paper examines different roles of the translator, from a proofreader to a friend, thus presenting the complexity of the job. It also discusses the rights of the translator to enter the original author's skin and to introduce some changes in the original text. In order to offer an insight into the issue, there are presented three translators of Kapuściński's texts who touch upon certain questions crucial for a better understanding of the problem.

Keywords: journalist, writer, translator, foreign languages, original text

1. RYSZARD KAPUŚCIŃSKI

In order to discuss the aforementioned issue, first it would be advisable to present the personal profile of Ryszard Kapuściński.

Kapuściński was one of the most important Polish journalists, poets, translators, photographers and writers of non-fiction. He was born in 1932 in Pińsk, cur-

¹ My translation.

rently located in Belarus. At the age of sixteen he joined the official Communist youth organization, Union of Polish Youth (ZMP) and he started writing for a newspaper which served as its organ, "Sztandar Młodych". In 1953, due to his developing interests in politics, Kapuściński became a member of the Communist Party (the PZPR, Polish United Workers' Party). In the period between the years 1958 and 1962 he worked as a domestic correspondent of the weekly "Polityka", which at that time served as an organ of the Communist Party (PAP 2010). In 1962 Kapuściński started working as the first correspondent of the Polish Press Agency (PAP) in Africa, where he spent five years and visited numerous countries. He himself perceived his work as an act of translation. This was, however, not a translation from one language to another, but a translation between different cultures. Due to the fact that his writing was inextricably connected with politics, the author had many problems with censorship. A film-script adaptation of *Cesarz (The Emperor)* was banned by the censors during communism and thus has never reached the production stage. Among numerous works written by Kapuściński there are *Szachinszach (Shah of Shahs)* (1982), *Heban (The Shadow of the Sun)* (1998) or *Podróże z Herodotem (Travels with Herodotus)* (2004). It needs to be mentioned that a great many of his texts have their English version. This should not come as a surprise, because Kapuściński is one of the Polish writers most frequently translated into foreign languages.

As it has been already presented, Kapuściński gained international recognition mainly by writing articles about the Third World and he called such type of writing 'literary reportage.' In the English speaking world his texts have been classified as "magic journalism" (as opposed to "magic realism"). According to Gabriel García Márquez, one of the leading practitioners of magic realism, Kapuściński was an ingenious observer and was capable of creating a convincing picture out of the attentively observed fragments of war and revolution. He was particularly sensitive to the problems of the dispossessed due to the fact that he himself was born into poverty. When talking about Kapuściński in relation to the translation act, it should be noted that on numerous occasions his writings may have constituted a problem, as they involved some covert political comments. It may have been difficult to render the author's thoughts and at the same time not to disclose it to the censorship.

2. THE TRANSLATOR AS A BETRAYER OR AN INVISIBLE ENTITY?

Having presented the original author's background, it would be worth considering the role of the translator with reference to the original author.

The past saw the translator as a mere shadow of the original author. Translator's names began to appear in the translated works only after many centuries during which a vague inscription informing about the original language of the book

was to suffice. According to Venuti (1995: 1) translation was considered to be a second-order representation and the translator was always treated as a betrayer of the original author and his thoughts. Not surprisingly, all this contributed to diminishing the role of the translator and, in turn, implied his or her invisibility in society.

When the situation began to change and translators' names started to appear on the covers more frequently, the translators gained importance. It became obvious that the role of the translator would be burned deeply into readers' awareness. Nevertheless, the question about the manner in which the translator should become present in the text was remaining unanswered. According to Koller (1988: 60), the translator can manifest their existence in the text in two ways. One of them is called a formulated translation theory, where the translator reveals himself in footnotes and prefaces, talking about his or her decisions considering the act of translation. In counterpoint to this there is non-formulated translation theory, which requires a close reading of the original and its translation. In this case, the translator's priorities can be inferred on the basis of the comparison of two versions and the translator does not reveal him- or herself directly.

Throughout many years since Koller formulated his theory concerning the translator's visibility, translators have become liberated and their names have gained significance. This, in turn, has once again led to a heated debate over the role of the translator and there have risen numerous questions concerning the issue.

3. THE TRANSLATOR AS A CRAFTSMAN?

*Jeśli pióra twojego nie ufasz zbyt sile
Ani w dowcipie twoim nie masz mocy tyle,
Ażebyś własnym płodem mógł język wzbogacić,
Masz-li dosyć wprawności – nie chciej czasu
tracić,
Przebieraj obce dzieła na krój polski gładko.²*
(Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski)

As presented in the canto above, throughout the years the translator has been perceived as a person whose skills were insufficient to allow him or her to create his or her own texts. There has reigned an opinion that the translator is an unaccomplished writer. The translator of Latin American and Spanish literature into Polish, Carlos Marrodán, argues, however, that although in some cases this statement may be true, there must be an element of a writer in everyone willing to work

² The Polish canto presents the translator as a person who is not capable of writing texts by him- or herself and thus the only possibility for him or her is to translate some else's works.

as a translator³. According to him, the translator needs to follow the author's way of thinking and has to enter the skin of the original author. Moreover, he or she has to know how certain words would sound if the original author was able to write them in another language. This idea seems to be shared by Ryszard Kapuściński himself, who once said:

Words are incomprehensible if one has not lived through that about which one writes. If it hasn't penetrated through the blood. (Kapuściński in Kuprel 2004–2006: 353)

In the case of Ryszard Kapuściński, it needs to be mentioned at the very beginning that he worked as a professional translator himself.⁴ This leads to the conclusion that he would be capable of preparing auto-translation of his works into some languages. However, Kapuściński decided to commission the translation of his texts to others. It could be argued that the reason for that was the fact that the auto-translation would have a negative impact on the final version.

Talking about commissioning one's translation to someone else, it is crucial to touch upon the question of the original author's attitude towards his or her translators.

In the case of Kapuściński and his translators, it needs to be mentioned that the writer used to create a unique bond between the translator and himself. Instead of alienating himself from the act of translation, he observed the work of his translators and perceived them as ambassadors and the very first readers of his texts:

[...] zadania tłumaczy nie ograniczają się dziś do przełożenia tekstu na inny tekst, z jednego języka na drugi. Jako autor doznawałem zawsze i nadal odczuwam ich wielką życzliwość i pomoc na wielu polach i w różnych formach. Bo tłumacz to także ktoś jak agent literacki czy wręcz ambasador danego autora, a często i entuzjasta jego twórczości, ktoś, kto proponuje i poleca ją wydawcom, zwraca na nią uwagę miejscowych mediów, pisze recenzje i rekomendacje. To – szerzej – znawca i krytyk literatury, do której należą „jego” autorzy. (Kapuściński 2005)

[...] nowadays tasks of translators are not limited to translating one text into another, from one language to another. As the author I have experienced their friendliness and helpfulness on numerous fields and in different forms. The translator is a literary agent or an ambassador of the particular author. On many occasions he or she is also an enthusiast of the original author's work and somebody who offers and recommends him or her to editors, draws attention of the local media, writes summaries and recommendations. In broader terms, the translator is an expert and a critic of the literature to which “his” or “her” authors belong.⁵

Without any shadow of doubt, Kapuściński enormously appreciated the work performed by his translators, as he was aware of the fact that they were respon-

³ The statement originates from the interview made in February 2011 for the sake of this paper.

⁴ His renderings pertained mainly to politics, as he translated, among others, Che Guevara's bequest.

⁵ All the quotations in my translation.

sible for spreading his ideas. Apart from that, the author perceived translators as teachers, thanks to whom the reader had a chance to enter a foreign reality. It was the translator that offered the reader a possibility to broaden his or her horizons and to make the reader more sensitive to particular phenomena.

4. THE TRANSLATOR AS A FRIEND?

Although the author and his or her translator cooperate mainly in the field of literature that is, to put it explicitly, in business, it is possible to create a special kind of a relationship between the two. This may prove especially useful when the translator faces an obstacle or a linguistic problem with which he or she cannot deal by him- or herself. The original author constitutes a unique source of knowledge and he or she may dispel some of the translator's doubts. Susan Bassnett argues:

The translator is to choose carefully, to select an author with whom there is a sense of empathy, what he terms 'a sympathetic bond'. They cease to exist as separate entities and become one. (Bassnett 1996: 10)

Kapuściński seemed to take a similar position, as for him all those contacts with his translators were really close. Apart from meeting them before the actual act of translation started, the author used to maintain contact with them after the translation was finished. All Kapuściński's translators mention that the writer used to invite them to his place and they used to chat with him for hours. This points to the fact that he did not treat them as coworkers, but as friends.

Moja tłumaczka, mój tłumacz, moja autorka, mój autor – niezmiernie cenne są te osobiste znajomości i przyjaźnie. (Kapuściński 2005)⁶
My translator, my author – I especially appreciate all those contacts and friendships.

These words seem to perfectly summarize Kapuściński's attitude towards his translators. The translators unanimously agree that the writer paid a lot of attention to their private lives and problems, which, in turn, proved to play a vital role in their cooperation. These personal contacts may have been helpful as they allowed the translator to better understand the original author's way of thinking which, in turn, has led to a better rendition of the original version.

⁶ All the fragments described as "Kapuściński 2005" come from the speech developed in Cracow of 12th May 2005 during the World Congress of Translators of Polish Literature.

5. THE TRANSLATOR AS A WRITER?

It may be argued that in the case when the translator performs the task of translating a particular text, apart from rendering the original author's thoughts, to some extent he or she creates the next anew. This is the case no matter how close one wants to keep to the original author's style. Consequently, such situation may lead to some authorial inclinations of the translators, as they are becoming more and more independent, as well as more aware of their importance. Tokarz suggests that

[...] the role of the translator in the translation process is as important as the one of the author. He or she is the receiver of the original, as well as the producer of the message that is the result of his or her interpretation. (Tokarz 2002: 9)

As Tokarz points out, it is not the original author's words, but only the interpretation prepared by the translator, which appears on the surface of the translated text and reaches the reader. Thus when the reader claims that he or she likes the particular writer's style, the truth is that he approves of the phrasing proposed by the author. Beyond any doubt in such a situation one can face a dilemma of answering a question: who in fact is the author of a translated book? Is it still the original author, whose ideas the translator tries to render, or is it the translator, whose phrasings actually appear in the text? Kapuściński, who seemed to be well aware of this phenomenon, argued:

Nie doceniamy, myślę, faktu, że znana nam światowa literatura tylko w połowie pisana jest przez autorów. W pozostałej części tworzą ją tłumacze. (Kapuściński 2005)
I think we do not appreciate the fact that all the world's literature is written by the authors only in its half. The rest of it is created by the translators.

By saying these words Kapuściński clearly suggests that the translator is a creator whose task is not only to render the author's ideas, but to come up with a new version of the text.

Having talked about Kapuściński's opinion on the role of his translator, it is impossible not to touch upon the question of the translator's rights and authorship.

It may be argued that the most common dilemma for the majority of translators relates to the extent to which they can change or add something from themselves, should they be faithful to their conscience and style or should they rather follow the original author's methods and wordings. Deciding on any of the two proposed ways has serious consequences. On the one hand, being too literal and keeping the writer's style at all cost may have a negative effect. On the other hand, however, if the translator exercises his translator's freedom to a great extent, he

or she may be accused of being willing to replace the original author. A good example is one of the most brilliant Polish translators, Zofia Chądzyńska, who translated Julio Cortázar or Gabriel García Márquez from Spanish. It is usually claimed by the literary critics that her translations were better than the originals. She became so famous that she had immense impact on shaping the Polish literary scene, as it was thanks to her language that a certain type of literature appeared in Poland.⁷

Ryszard Kapuściński seems to be aware of the fact that the translator always plays a vital role in creating a particular text, as he argues:

[...] wiemy, w jakim stopniu tłumacz jest współautorem książki, w jakim stopniu, na danym terytorium książka ta może tylko dzięki niemu zaistnieć. (Kapuściński 2005)

[...] we know to what extent the translator is the author of a book and to what extent it is thanks to him or her that the book starts to exist on the particular territory.

Beyond any doubt, if the translator creates and coins some new phrasings for the sake of the translated text, another problem that he or she may encounter concerns correcting the original author. Sometimes it happens that the writer commits a mistake, be it a factual or a literal one. The translator's task is to decide whether to treat the author as the omniscient one, whose words should be retained no matter whether they are correct or erroneous, or to correct him or her and thus change the original and introduce some new content to the translated text. Not surprisingly, opinions on this issue vary from one translator to another. According to Kapuściński, the translator is the most important and, at the same time, the most careful reader of the writer's text. Kapuściński underlines the fact that during many years he has received numerous letters from his translators, in which they pointed to some inaccuracies in the originals. A matter of great significance in such situation is the attitude of the writer towards corrections made by the translator. One has to be careful because a particular author may turn out to be too proud to accept any sort of criticism. There are also authors who tend to ignore any tips given by the translators. For instance, Carlos Marrodán Casas who translated Carlos Ruiz Zafón's books from Spanish to Polish which, according to the translator, are full of factual mistakes, used to write to the author in order to indicate all the fallacies. Nevertheless, the author has never answered.

Having touched upon the question of authorship and the translator's rights, it would be beneficial to present some examples from Ryszard Kapuściński's experience in order to investigate whether his translators may be considered to be second authors.

⁷ Julio Cortázar was so astonished at the success of his *Rayuela* (in Polish: *Gra w klasy*) that he himself doubted whether Chądzyńska really rendered his style. He used to joke that he would never find out what she had written in the book.

6. KAPUŚCIŃSKI AND HIS TRANSLATORS

Among numerous translators of Ryszard Kapuściński's works there are Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand and her husband William Brand, who were the writer's first coworkers in the field of translation into English. Their translations include *Cesarz (The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat, 1978)*, *Szachinszach (Shah of Shahs 1982)* and *Jeszcze dzień życia (Another Day of Life 1976)*. They both faced a very famous dilemma of the translators, that is the one of *traduttore traditore* – translator as traitor. They seemed to be perfectly aware of some loss that the act of translation unavoidably brings along:

Przetłumaczyć..., tylko jak to zrobić, żeby było znakomicie i bez dużej utraty, bo że jakaś utrata musi być zawsze, wie każdy uczciwy i szczerzy wobec siebie tłumacz i filolog (Mroczkowska-Brand, in: Dudko 2007: 30)

To translate...but how to do that to make it perfect and not lose much, because every honest translator and philologist knows that some loss cannot be avoided.

Although the couple knew they would not be capable of rendering their master's style very faithfully, they were still looking for a panacea in the act of translation.

What undoubtedly helped the Brands to follow Kapuściński's thoughts was the fact that they had a very close relationship with the author. Brand reminds in Dudko (2007: 50) that on one occasion after a meeting in Kraków Kapuściński gave him a lift to the outskirts of the city and went back home. Only after some time did the translator find out that Kapuściński, having given him a lift, ran out of petrol and had to hitchhike in order to get back to the city. According to the translator, this situation perfectly describes the author's attitude towards others.

The situation was no different in terms of translation. Mroczkowska-Brand emphasizes the fact that the writer was extremely caring and understanding even when their opinions on particular words or sentences differed (2007: 49). The translators were given a free hand, as Kapuściński used to say:

[...] róbcie, jak uważacie, byle byście mieli z tego przyjemność!" (Mroczkowska-Brand, in: Dudko 2007: 43)

[...] do whatever you please, just have fun doing it!

These words constitute an example of the friendship and some unusual trust offered by Kapuściński not only to the Brands, but also to other translators. According to many others working with Kapuściński and his texts, the author always appreciated their work and he was extremely grateful for all the effort put into preparing a new version of his writings. Brand says:

Ryszard Kapuściński z ogromną radością i wręcz zachwytem czytał fragmenty tłumaczenia, gdy wreszcie udało nam się spotkać, a co najważniejsze – obdarzył nas swoim zaufaniem i ogromną życzliwością. (Brand, in: Dudko 2007: 35)

Ryszard Kapuściński read fragments of the translation with a great happiness or even admiration when we met at last. His kindness and trust in us was of the utmost importance.

Another translator of Kapuściński's text is Klara Głowczewska, who also prepared English versions of the writer's works with *Imperium* (*Imperium*, 1993) or *Heban* (*The Shadow of the Sun*, 2001), among others.

Beyond any doubt Głowczewska's way of approaching texts deserves special attention, as it is quite an unusual one. She explains that for her taking part in the translation process is similar to a space trip towards a distant star. The way through a tangle of possible linguistic solutions is not always easy, but in the end the translator lands safely in the place previously indicated by the original author, that is, in a rendering of the writer's work. Głowczewska admits that every time she is commissioned a translation of Kapuściński's book, it takes her long to work on that. It happens so because she needs much time to think about all possible solutions and choose the best option. Before that, however, she prepares the very first draft of the translation, in which every Polish word is assigned three or four English equivalents. At the end of the process, when she is acquainted with the text, she feels which option would be most suitable and which she should choose. What may seem interesting is the fact that the translator knows that at some point she has to move away from the source language and start working only with the target language. From that time she calls it "her" text, which constantly undergoes a detailed analysis:

Gdybyś tylko wiedział, Rysiu, co się naprawdę dzieje! Przecież ja wywracam twoje książki na lewą stronę! Przetawiam i łączę na nowo ich językowe składniki: mnożę je, wywołuję werbalne miniwybuchy w każdym akapicie, w każdym wersie. Rozpruwam wszystkie szwy. Każda decyzja, jaką podjąłeś w trakcie pisania [...] zostaje przeze mnie unieważniona, starta, wymazana. (Głowczewska, in: Dudko 2007: 60)

If you only knew what really happens! I turn your books inside out! I reorder and join anew their linguistic components: I multiply them, I cause verbal mini explosions in every paragraph, in every line. I unstitch. Every decision which you took during your writing (...) is invalidated by me, it is rubbed out.

These words point to the fact that Głowczewska seems to consider herself an author from the specific point in the translation process. She enters the reality of the target language very slowly and gradually. Having noted all the possible solutions, the translator begins to move faster and forgets the world of source language that is left behind her. Surprisingly enough, her manner of shaping the new reality to some extent could have been influenced by Ryszard Kapuściński, whom she knew in person. This again points to the fact that the acquaintance with the origi-

nal author may help the translator to dispel some doubts or to better understand the writer's style.

As the question of correcting the original author has been already touched upon, it might be essential to present one of the translators of Kapuściński's works who is not afraid of pointing to the mistakes of the original author. Tapani Kärkkäinen, who translates Kapuściński's words into Finnish⁸, claims that it is customary in Finland to correct the original author's mistakes (Kärkkäinen, in: Dudko 2007: 146). However, usually this happens only after talking to the original author and dispelling any possible doubts. It may be argued that the author has to approve of any changes introduced in the translation. This might be the reason why at the beginning of his career Kärkkäinen was afraid and felt unsure as to any improvements of the original version. The translator himself argues

Nieco mi ulżyło, gdy sam Kapuściński zaczął ze mną rozmawiać o tłumaczach i przekładach. Ma on ogromny szacunek do swoich tłumaczy i jest zdania, że tłumacz w gruncie rzeczy pisze książkę na nowo. (Kärkkäinen, in: Dudko 2007: 147)

I felt a great relief when Kapuściński himself began to talk to me about the translations of his texts. He has an enormous respect towards his translators and he thinks that the translator writes the text anew.

These words may constitute a proof of how understanding Kapuściński was for his translators.

CONCLUSIONS

All the presented examples have led me to the conclusion that the boundary between the original author and his or her translator is extremely delicate. The translator, who in the past had to remain in the shadow of the original author and his effort was ignored, has gained a lot of significance and nowadays he or she plays a vital role not only in the act of translation, but also in the original author's life. The translator can serve different functions, from the proofreader to a friend. Sometimes, however, the translator enters the world of the translated text to such extent that he or she may feel some authorial inclinations. They may feel the desire to act as an author and to correct or introduce some changes into the text. However, as it could be observed on the basis of the example of Ryszard Kapuściński and his translators, on some occasions the author can approve of the changes proposed by the translator and it may prove to be beneficial for the text. There are some authors, with Kapuściński among them, who claim that it is perfectly natural that the translation has a different author, because the renderings and

⁸ Among his translations there are *Imperium* (*Imperium*, 1993), *Heban* (*Eebenpuu*, 2002) or *Cesarz* (*Keisari*, 2006).

phrasings are invented by a different person. On this basis it could be argued that the translator can act as the second author who has a consent given by the original author, as it happened in the case of Ryszard Kapuściński and his translators.

STRESZCZENIE

Celem niniejszej pracy jest zbadanie, w jakim stopniu tłumacz danego tekstu ma prawo wejść w rolę pierwotnego autora. Przykładem jest to, że Ryszard Kapuściński, polski dziennikarz i pisarz, i jego tłumacze na wiele języków obcych, których doświadczenia dotyczące aktu tłumaczenia zostały opisane w kompilacji *Podróże z Ryszardem Kapuścińskim, Opowieści trzynastu tłumaczy*. Bożeny Dudko (2007). Dokument ten bada różne role tłumacza, z korektora do znajomego, przedstawiając w ten sposób złożoność zadania. Omawia również uprawnienia tłumacza, aby wejść w oryginalną skórę autora i wprowadzić pewne zmiany w tekście oryginalnym. W celu zaoferowania wglądu w problem, prezentowani są trzy tłumaczenia tekstów Kapuścińskiego, którzy dotyczą niektórych kwestii kluczowych dla lepszego zrozumienia problemu.

Słowa kluczowe: dziennikarz, pisarz, tłumacz, języki obce, tekst oryginalny

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