

THEATRICAL TRANSLATION: PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING 'THE SANDBOX' FROM STANDARD ENGLISH INTO CENTRAL KURDISH.

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ABSTRACT: *Translating is a problematic process, and the problems rooted in different aspects, different types of translation might acquire various obstacles, including literary translation and theatrical translation. Amongst other types of translation, the translation of theater has specific problems, as it deals with text and spoken message. Besides, translating from a developed language like English into a minor language of Kurdish may face some other problems. This article, sheds light on the relationship between translation and theater and the problems faced in translating the theater of 'the sandbox' from English into Kurdish, and the how the problems of translation solved through different translational strategies.*

KEYWORDS: Translation, English, Kurdish, Theatrical Translation, Sandbox

INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the issues raised in translating a theatrical text from Standard English into Sorani Kurdish. In fact, the problems faced in this translation might be from different aspects, as theatrical translation contains textual and extra textual problems, including issues of performance and gesture signs, since any theatrical text is translated to be spoken on the stage.

There have been really few theatrical works translated from English in to Kurdish and performed on the stage, as in general, theatre has not had a good position in the society, the main reason is as stated by (Kardozi, 2012) that "cultural and individual awareness toward cinema and theatre has been very weak, and Kurds found poetry more important than other forms of literature and art". That is relatively true, but still one can see some important and very significant theatrical works have been translated, for example *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Merchant of Venice* by **Shakespeare**. And the theatrical works which were translated mostly for an educational purpose, for encouraging learners to learn English, rather than any performance on the stage.

In this article, the focus is on the issues in translating a particular theatrical work, *The Sandbox* by **Edward Albee**, which has been translated from English in to Sorani Kurdish in 2008, by **Rebwar Zaynadin**, at the **University of Koya**. It was first translated for the purpose of teaching it in a drama class, for the students of translation department, and then was performed on the stage by a group of actors at **Koya Institution of Fine Arts**. In this essay, in order to discuss the problems of translating the text in details, all the different aspects should be taken into consideration, such as: social, political, linguistic, performative and ideological.

This essay is a new subject to the Kurdish language, the lack of Kurdish resources is a problem, but the major problem is that, this may be the first essay or piece of writing about

such a topic in Kurdish language. What I want to say is that we have not had a good researchers or active readership in this field. It is true that some theatre texts have been translated, but researching on the problems of translation and translation criticism has been very rare, that is why in this case we should apply English written theories and recourses mainly, and some Kurdish recourses to illustrate the linguistic and grammatical problems.

It is also important to know that when we talk about this kind of translation, the words 'play' and 'drama' are usually used together, in other words the two terms are used interchangeably, that is basically for the sake of the readership to know that they refer to the written text and to the performance, as (Aaltonen, 1993:33) states "to refer generically to either performance or printed copy". Since this theatrical work was translated to read and was then spoken on the stage while performing.

The Context of the Theater

The Sandbox was written in (1959), by **Edward Albee**, who was born March 12, 1928, in Washington, D.C. he wrote several significant plays like *The American Dream*, *The Death of Bessie Smith* and *The Zoo Story* which effectively gave birth to American absurdist drama. Albee was hailed as the leader of a new theatrical movement and labeled as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill. He is, however, probably more closely related to the likes of such European playwrights as Beckett and Harold Pinter. Although they may seem at first glance to be realistic, the surreal nature of Albee's plays is never far from the surface. His best known play is *who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. {inline} <http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc44.html>{last accessed, 5 July 2012}

In his play *The Sandbox*, **Edward Albee** wants to highlight the social level of the individuals' relations with each other, in nearly modern age, 20th century, in U.S. This was clearly represented through the relation between Mommy, Daddy and Grandma, while the young couple is a symbolic representation of the new generation and Grandma refers to the previous generation. They are in severe ideological conflict about the way of life and how to deal with others. And that is why Albee describes his work as "an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society..... a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen." (Bottoms, 2005:2-5). He makes it clear that *The Sandbox* criticizes the idea that the U.S is full of prosperity and on the top of the social welfare, since there are still young couples who are ready to kill their elderly parents, without caring for what have they done for them until the point they live now.

The play is also an artistic image of the lifestyle in that particular time and place in history, as (Popkin, 1969:18) goes into more details by stating that "Albee explores not only the falsity of the American Dream but also the American family's status quo". From this point of view, **Albee** has criticized the American Dream, which is rooted in the United States Declaration of Independence which proclaims that "all men are created equal" and that they are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights" including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". {Online.} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Dream, {accessed, 6 July 2012}. According to that idea, the people of America, should be living in prosperous life, especially after their independence, and this should be kept along after generations as (Cullen, 2004:4) explains that "the American dream of better, richer and happier life,..... which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world.....save that dream from the forces which appeared to overwhelming it". This conveys the meaning that this dream is for U.S and all the people of the worlds, so every one should

save it. But Edward Albee falsifies this by showing real images of people that do not live a happy life, and they have severe problems.

The purpose behind choosing and translating this play, was having nearly the parallel societal situation in Kurdistan as was going on in 20th century in US. By translating this play, people can be familiarized with issues of generation conflicts that are happening in other countries, and also to show how to deal with it, and how previous societies afforded to manage it and pass it with fewer victims. So it had a didactic purpose, as (Jaf, 2010) believes that " translating *The Sandbox* was a good indication to make us aware that our society and family life are also subject to have the generation conflicts". This is, of course, to encourage people to respect elders and take their opinions and hobbies in to account.

Drama, Theatre and Translation

In an encompassing definition which includes both the translation of the written text into another language and it's transformation into performance, (Zuber-Skerritt, 1988:485) states that " drama translation is defined as the translation of the dramatic text from one language and culture into another, and the transposition of the original, translated or adapted text onto the stage". This definition clarifies that the main objective of this kind of translation is to be performed on the stage, and the first step is translating the theatrical text, and then transposing it on to the stage taking cultural differences into consideration. She goes on and asserts that " drama translation science must be concerned both with the text as the basis for the stage production and individual theatrical performance", in her point of view drama translation is a science, and the center of the success of this kind of translation is the written text as the basis of stage production, and also taking the individual performance ability into account.

The Issues

By and large, it is essential to realize that translating plays differs greatly from other types of translation, it is not translating just a normal text to be read by the readership, and it has also a performative dimension as (BassnettMcGuire 1985: 87) states that "...a theatre text exists in a dialectical relationship with the performance of that text. The two texts -written and performed- are coexistent and inseparable, and it is in this relationship that the paradox for the translator lies". It means that the issues in translating plays may be much more than what is faced in translating a normal text, since the translated text is mostly spoken on the stage, so it will be transposed on the stage through performance.

Translating *The Sandbox* from English into Kurdish faced problems in terms of both as a written text and as it's transposition on the stage. This essay tries to refer to some of that textual and extra textual issues, however there are very few analysis about the translation of this play as there are also few writings about problems of translating theatrical works as (Bassnett, 2002:123) argues " there is very little material on the special problems of translating dramatic texts". So this is a good indication that any research about problems in translating theatrical works might be much more difficult. The rest of the essay presents some of those issues the translator faced in translating *The Sandbox* from English into Kurdish.

The Equivalence Issue

One of other issues in translating this theatre text is the problem of deciding on the equivalence choices, and translation strategies. For example the translator translated (You can

imagine what that was like), (what do we do now?), (There is no respect around here) and (big cow) respectively as (etwani xeyalli ewe bikayt ka ewe chonbwe), and as (ema esta chy dakayn?), (hych rezek lam dawrwbara nya), and (mangay gawra), here, the translator used the semantic equivalence, he translated according to the semantic and structure of the Kurdish language as (Newmark, 1981:39) defines semantic equivalence and states " semantic translation attempts to render as closely the semantic and syntactic structure of the second language allow". The translator did not very aware of the effect of the message on the audience, which is very important in theatrical translation while in this kind of text the semantic equivalence may not work always, as (Pavis,1989:25-45) states that "translation in general and theatre translation in particular has changed paradigms: it can no longer be assimilated to a mechanism of production of semantic equivalence copied mechanically from the source text. It is rather to be conceived of as an appropriation of one text by another". That is to say that the translator should be very aware in the choices he makes, as the text especially in the spoken language is supposed to have the same effect on the target readership as it had on the source readership. The translator, in those above examples, has only translated the word meaning or sentences meanings, he did not successfully rendered the effect, especially if it is spoken on the stage.

The Social Issue

The social problems in translating *The Sandbox* from English into Kurdish was that, in the developing countries, people in general and the policy in particular, try to cover some issues and they do not normally intend to talk about them and to stir them among people. As (Pirball, 2004:38) argues that " there were so many big problems solved through the theatre and art in different countries all over the world, always developed nations used stage as a good means to show and solve their problems together, that is while in our societies, unfortunately, we usually try to put a cover on the issues until it explodes and we can not control it". So when this play of *The Sandbox* was translated and performed, many people, especially conservative people did not appreciate it, they thought that it can be a way to broaden the problems rather to solve them, as (Misry, 2009) on of the leading Kurdish film and theatre directors announced that " an absurd play like *The Sandbox* is very important, especially, when it uncovers social and family issues that may exist in our society, although it may result in reactions from conservatives and fundamentalists". He means there are people, who do not see it important to the present time, and stand against it.

It was clear that in a reaction the conservatives gave different statements in newspapers, like Kurdish famous actor and university tutor Niyaz Kamil, in a lecture stated " the absurd elements in *The Sandbox*, evolve the feeling of disrespect for elders, and those inappropriate behaviors do not valid in our religion and culture" (Kamil: 2010). This is very clear that the conservatives and fundamentalists believe that it is better not to talk about those problems, since they think that even if they are available, they are still very few. Although in my opinion, if there is a good statistic about those kinds of problems, it makes clear that they increase day after day.

The Performative Issue

One of the other problems faced the translation of *sandbox*, was how to perform it, carrying the same possible effect on the target audience. The main issue here is that there are not many people who care for theater in Kurdistan and we have very few stage actors, especially to perform this absurd and strange one act play. Performance of any play needs an appropriate

stage, in Kurdistan there are not good stages to perform as (Kardozi, 2012) argues that "we do not have a decent chains of theater houses to let the viewer watch a film in a rightful atmosphere". So lacking a good stage in Koya was another problem, finally they performed in the *Najiba Xan hall* which is not basically a stage for theatre performance.

Another important issue during the performance was that the translator himself did not monitor the quality of the translation he had done, because it is problematic and needs a good experience to translate it in a way that is very appropriate in the spoken language on the stage, many scholars in theatrical translation believe in that way, as (Zatlin, 2005:2) advises theatrical translators to become actors and listen to their work so that they may perceive "the problems of translating from spoken text to spoken text" and "become more sensitive to the vocal idiosyncrasies of both languages of their inherent rhythms, patterns and stress." The problem here in translating *The Sandbox*, may be that the translator had not basically translated the theater to be performed on the stage, rather to an educational purpose, that is why when the play was performed some characteristics of the spoken language was lacking and that influenced the effectiveness of the performance.

The Gender Issue

Another problem which the translator of *The Sandbox* faced was the gender problem, since in our society female actresses do not normally intend to play a role in sensitive plays, in fear of their social prestige and dignity, which is very problematic in the country. Women have so many limitations to have roles in the plays, as (Hamid, 2000:67) states that "to go further towards an open society, we should let women participate in the dramas and act on the stages, which are to be able to play their social and educational role in the society". He encouraged women to participate to act on the stages, since the women are also the other important half of the society. Especially outside the big cities, in a town like **Koya**, it was hard to find professional actresses. That was why one of the scholars in the field (Omer: 2010: 25) criticized by saying "in such a situation, the play was successful, however the actresses were not the same age as they are in the original play, this may have affect badly on their performance". She means that there were not actresses of that old age in **Koya** to play the roles. The translator and the group that performed the play solved the problem by choosing young actresses, although it affected their acting abilities.

The Issue of Audience

Kurdish as a minority language, and Kurd as a minority nation, has not had so many plays performed on the stage, whether in the original language or translated plays. That is why there is not a good, educated and passionate audience for theater, even in the present time. "It is clear that we do not have an eager audience for theater in our country". (Ibrahim, 2006:72). This really happened with the performance *The Sandbox* on the stage, it was expected to get more audience, but like all other plays, it had just a few people, there are many reasons like (Kardozi: 2012) makes it clear that " a normal Kurdish viewer does not have the desire to watch a film in theater weekly" he goes on to elucidate the reasons by saying ". Not having a system of education teaching cinema, lack of newspapers and books on such subjects in Kurdish language, nor having a School or an educational institution teaching and educating future generation of filmmakers are some other reasons behind the poor state of Kurdish theatre", he made clear the reasons behind the state of having less people to care about theatre, and that was what happened during the performance of *The Sandbox* in Koya.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, translating theatrical works from one language into another has problems which are different from other kind of translations, or translation activities. In this case translating *The Sandbox* from English into Kurdish faced more problems, since there are big differences between the source culture and language as compared to the target language and culture.

The issues raised in translating *The Sandbox*, as were explained, included social, ideological, performative and equivalence. The translator tried to solve those issues, as much as he could, according to the nature of the issues. All those issues finally affected the production, because he may not have been able to afford to solve all problems.

The essay uncovered the fact that there are very few materials on theatrical translation, especially, in Kurdish. And because of the poor state of Kurdish theater, *The Sandbox* has not echoed very well in the country, so the message may have not reached the people very appropriately.

Finally, the translator of theatrical texts should be more a ware, as they normally translate both texts and spoken language, because when a play is translated, it is a written text, and when it is performed on the stage; it should be dealt with as the spoken text.

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