

Translating for the Theatre

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1 Introduction

Theatre translation is an applied form of translation that has connections with literary and poetry translation but is in fact hyper-specialised because, unlike the broader activity of drama translation, it is focused on a performed text and that text's users. The readers of translated theatrical texts encompass active consumers, such as theatre practitioners creatively engaged in the design and development phases of performance, and actors who learn and reproduce the text either orally as dialogue or semiotically as movement; but also readers for reference purposes: audience members, theatre enthusiasts, academic researchers, teachers and students. Translated dramatic texts are increasingly frequently published and distributed via theatres and specialist publishing houses, but theatre translations may also be circulated only among the participants of a particular production and limited to a restricted readership while still being disseminated widely through performance. Translating for the theatre is therefore a specialist activity requiring linguistic and performance expertise and an understanding of the environment within which the eventual text will be performed. The specificities of this type of translation have had the effect of creating a sub-set of methodologies and terminologies recognisable from other branches of translation or text types but which in theatre have specialist applications. Furthermore, the nature of theatre practice and the progressive development of different forms of theatre-making influence the modes of creation of translated theatrical texts.

To demonstrate the specificity of translating for theatre, this chapter begins with an examination of the products of the theatre translation process, and their users. Detailing the physical forms of theatre translation provides background for a discussion of the variety of methods applied in translating for the theatre, contrasting, in particular, the direct translation of a source text to a target text by a specialist translator with the frequently found practice of commissioning an expert linguist to create a literal translation which is then used by a theatre practitioner to generate a text for performance. This leads to an examination of the theatrical terminologies relating to performed texts of plays initially composed in another language than that of the performers and prospective audience and the lack of consistency in equating such terms as translation, version, adaptation and other lexis with the processes actually taking place. The role of the translator in the theatrical environment is then considered, investigating the extent to which theatrical collaborative practices are reflected in theatre translation. The chapter ends with a discussion of the implications for theatre translation of relevant theories from the wider translation arena, focusing on retranslation and the application of adaptation theory and its extremes. I argue that although translating for the theatre is a specifically-targeted practical activity it nevertheless sheds light on broader issues around collaboration, performance and creativity in translation.

2 Translating for Target Users

When thinking about translating for the theatre it is important to establish the specificities of this mode of practical translation, differentiating it from the more general conception of drama translation. Sirku Aaltonen (2000: 33) recognizes that ‘the double tie of dramatic texts to the literary and theatrical systems is present in the way “drama” is used to refer to both a written text and a theatrical performance’. Aaltonen’s analysis identifies the overlaps but also the variations between literary and theatrical textual functions, where drama is the object of literary translation for readers whereas theatre translation is intended for

performance. Given that this places focus on the targets for translated dramatic texts, it is helpful to consider practical illustrations of translated theatrical text users to understand the significance of translation for theatre before going on to consider the translation process in detail.

Janet Garton, herself both an academic and a translator (from Norwegian), discusses the guidelines she composed with her co-editors of a new series of English translations of the plays of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) for Penguin Books, which specifically addressed the ‘conflict between [...] a reading and an acting edition’. Garton and her collaborators acknowledged that the translations they sought to commission for this series, intended primarily for students, academics and a more general readership, would ‘pay closer attention to the original than do most modern acting editions. [...] Realistically considered, this will mean that this will not be a text which can without revision be performed on the contemporary stage’. A secondary aim for the series was that it could ‘also function as the best “reference edition” for people from the theatre who are [...] involved in producing one of the plays’ (Garton 2018: 292); this series is thus an example of the intersection of literary and theatrical systems discussed by Aaltonen. Significantly, the nature of the readership was systematically prioritized and the translators briefed accordingly.

In the event, the translators commissioned for the Penguin series were experienced in both drama and theatre translation; their curricula vitae display their ability to differentiate between literary systems and to target relevant audiences. Erik Skuggevik, for example, co-translator with Deborah Dawkin for Volumes 2 and 3, had previously translated Ibsen’s *Ghosts* for production at the Octagon Theatre Bolton in 2009. His translation was reviewed by Andrew Liddle (2009) as ‘sensitive, sinuous, [...] the real star turn here’, praising the ‘impassioned and utterly realistic’ dialogue. This assessment indicates Skuggevik’s aptitude to create a script which supports the immediacy of performance. On the other hand, Garton’s

analysis of Dawkin and Skuggevik's annotation in explanatory notes of their translation decisions for *A Doll's House* in the Penguin series highlights the documentation of fine detail such as 'the breach of etiquette in using a familiar form of address' to inform a source-oriented readership (Garton 2018: 301) These varying approaches reveal not only the differing translations required for theatre audiences and readers of drama but also the awareness and ability of translators of the necessity to tailor their product for its users. Another of the Penguin Ibsen translators, Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife, is acknowledged as the creator of the literal translation of *Hedda Gabler* used by the playwright Cordelia Lynn to write her modern adaptation, renamed *Hedda Tesman*. Lynn (2019: 7) notes the attention to Ibsen's 'structure, story, form, tone and symbolism' for which she would have drawn on Stanton-Ife's translation. In this case, Stanton-Ife addresses a third type of translation-user: the theatre practitioner creating a text for performance.

Such theatre practitioners, identifiable with Garton's 'people from the theatre' who might turn to the Penguin Ibsen for reference, are active users of specialist translations for theatre. In addition to playwrights such as Lynn who are writing new adaptations, a range of theatrical creative practitioners require translated theatre texts when commissioning and developing a production. Nicholas Hytner, the former artistic director of the Royal National Theatre (more usually referred to as the National Theatre) in London, describes the limitations of using extant translations as the basis of decision-making when commissioning plays from languages other than that of the target audience for production (and retranslation). Ibsen's *Kejser og Galilæer* (1873), first translated into English as *Emperor and Galilean* by William Archer (1856-1924), but never previously staged in English, was read through by a group of actors 'in turgid Victorian blank verse over a long day at the NT Studio' (Hytner 2017: 195). The decision was made to commission a production in 2011 in the form of a new version by Ben Power based on a literal translation by Anne-Marie Stanton-Ife and Marie

Wells, even though the read-through had prompted unintended laughter. Hytner's verdict on the resulting production was that it 'embraced the modernity of what Ibsen had to say about fundamentalism and totalitarianism, and at the same time gave its audience as lucid an account as possible of a play that it had never seen and would never see again' (ibid). This response indicates the difficulties of basing a commission on a translation intended for a different readership.

Theatre practitioners also use translations to make detailed production decisions. The director Katie Mitchell constructs her handbook for theatre directors around an extended case study of her production of *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) for the National Theatre in 2006. Although the final production was a performance of a new version by the playwright Martin Crimp based on a literal translation by Helen Rappaport, Mitchell uses an earlier 1986 translation by Michael Frayn to document her advance preparation for planning the production and directing rehearsals (Mitchell 2009: 2). Frayn is a playwright, but also a Russian-speaker, writing in a note to his published translations that his two principles are that 'each line should be what that particular character would have said at that particular moment if he had been a native English-speaker [and that] every line must be as immediately comprehensible as it was in the original' (Frayn 1993: 357). However, Frayn provides detailed notes on the history and context of the plays, their literary allusions, how he solved specific translation and dramaturgical issues, and how to pronounce the Russian names. Mitchell's reference to Frayn's translation is an example of a practitioner using a published text for reference purposes. It is noteworthy that, although Frayn explicitly states that his translations 'are intended for production' (ibid 355), his text was used neither for the production nor as the source text for Crimp's new performance text. For a discussion of Martin Crimp's use of Helen Rappaport's translation, see Brodie (2018b). This is a further

indication of the applied specificities of theatre translation and the targeted usage for translated dramatic texts.

Further theatre practitioner users with specific requirements of translated texts are, of course, actors, whose task is to learn and perform the lines in their scripts. A stage play, as the playwright David Edgar points out, is ‘an art form squeezed into such narrow confines [of time and format that it] has built up a repertoire of conventions’ (Edgar 2009: xii). A theatre text must be capable of delivery by actors, but the construction of a play is the confluence of many elements (action, plot, structure, characterization, period and genre, for example) which underpin the spoken dialogue beyond the deliverability of the words. In theorising translation for performance, the nature of this ‘speakability’ and - in relation to the text as a whole - the existence of a concept of ‘performability’ have been subjected to extended debate as to whether they are pre-inscribed in the source text and the extent to which it may be possible to reflect such qualities in a target translation. Silvia Bigliuzzi, Peter Kofler and Paola Ambrosi rehearse this controversial debate, including Susan Bassnett’s shifting position on the existence of a ‘gestic text, or inner text that is read intuitively by actors’ (Bassnett 1998: 92), before reaching the conclusion that translation for performance ‘means adjusting the language-body of the source text to the individual requirements of the target culture in a continuous encounter of actorial practices’ (Bigliuzzi et al. 2013: 9. The actor’s embodiment thus ‘exceed[s] the meaning of the verbal text at every single performance’ (ibid); nevertheless, writers and translators for theatre are generally acutely aware of actors as users of their texts.

The theatre practitioner and writer Lisa Goldman notes that ‘actors do wonders to breathe life into dead drama’ but emphasizes the need for playwrights to create living dialogue that is ‘believable’ in its artistic context (Goldman 2012: 120). In constructing translated text to be spoken by an actor, theatre translators feel themselves to be under a similar obligation. May-

Brit Akerholt records an example of translating for a specific performer renowned for an idiosyncratically emotional approach to his delivery: choosing ‘a two- rather than a three-syllable word, or a “light” word instead of a “dark” one’ in order to mitigate the already ‘elaborate and intense’ speeches of the source text (Akerholt 2017: 26). This is the epitome of a targeted translation, where a particular actor’s technique is reflected in the script, but Akerholt argues that the ensuing translated language ‘becomes anchored in a specificity whose ultimate result is universality – perhaps because there is an authenticity which cannot otherwise be achieved?’ (op. cit.: 25). Thus, writing performance into the translation by focusing on a specific user produces a text that more accurately represents the performance qualities of the original play. Kate Eaton demonstrates how this emphasis on actors as users of translation can be used to develop further elements of the text beyond the verbal through a collaborative rehearsal process in such a way that ‘words may very well be adapted into movement, music, lighting, and sound’ (Eaton 2012: 172-173). Eaton considers the rehearsal process a significant contributing feature for the outcome of the translation because it provides an opportunity to focus attention on the underlying nature of the source text while also finding a way to make the translation work for the actors who ultimately will be ‘the ones exposed on stage’ (op. cit.: 181).

This vulnerability of the actors is a direct result of their appearance before a further body of translation users: the theatre audience. That audience is at the end of the user-chain and potentially the most populated user-group, arguably making it also the most significant. Certainly directors, actors, translators and other relevant theatre practitioners will take audience (and critical) reception into account when creating a translated production. Within the physical theatre, audiences experience a multi-sensory reception of a translated text. However, they may also become readers of a translated performance text, returning to the published text for subsequent review and possible comparative purposes. Certain English-

speaking theatres now sell the text of a translated play alongside or in place of a theatre programme; the National and the Royal Court theatres in London even have their own bookshops within the theatre building. Specialists such as Nick Hern Books, theatre publishers and performing rights agents, or Oberon Books, independent performing arts publishers, prepare a newly translated text in advance for sale at the theatre from the opening night of the performance, usually including a note to the effect that the text went to press before the end of rehearsals and therefore may differ slightly from the performed play. The published text also records the date and place of the first production, lists the cast and creative artists and provides details of the copyright holder and the performing rights managers and agents (who may vary dependent on prospective amateur and professional performance and geographical region). This text therefore not only represents the performed translation but also creates a record of its physical production, demonstrating again the encompassing nature of theatre translation and the variety of potential users and readers of a translated theatre text.

3 Theatre Translation Methodology and Terminology

It is unsurprising, given the range of users, that there are also methodological variations in the practical translation of texts for theatre. Identifying the decision-makers and commissioners of theatre translations is instructive in establishing which approaches are taken to the practical translation of a dramatic text, as is an analysis of the training and occupational backgrounds of the translators themselves. The ensuing variations are reflected in the terminology used to describe the translation output, as I explain in this section.

The translation practices I describe are based on my research on the processes of translating theatrical texts into English for performance on stage in central London theatres (Brodie 2018c). It is important to stress that the London context for theatre translation is not

necessarily representative of translation practices in other languages and cultures. However, London is a global centre for theatre. In 2018, as an example, the box office report produced by the Society of London Theatre, representing some 50 theatres around central London, reported 18,708 performances of all genres of theatre (musicals, plays and other entertainment) with 15,548,154 attendances (Society of London 2019). This volume and variety of productions in performance creates space for plays from a range of languages and cultures to be offered. Periodic snapshots I have captured of production listings in London indicate that there will regularly be around six to ten productions on stage based on plays originally composed in languages other than English. London theatre therefore provides a resource in which to examine different approaches to translating for the theatre.

The traditional concept of translation as an activity undertaken by an individual translator or team of specialist linguists tends not to apply in theatre. The previous section demonstrates the significance of the performance element sought within translated theatre texts by theatre practitioners when creating a staged production. The translator is usually one member of a syndicate of users and developers who tease out that performance element; identifying the role of the translator in theatre therefore involves identifying the nature of the translator's engagement within the syndicate. I have co-opted the term 'syndicate' because I wish to convey a looser collection of participants than is suggested by the notion of 'team'. The theatre translator may work directly with other theatre practitioners - I examine collaborative translation further in section 4 - but it is also possible that the translator of a theatre text will never come into contact with other theatre practitioners, or that the source language text created by the translator will not be the final text performed on stage. London theatre illustrates these, and more, variations.

Two basic distinctions can be made in theatre translation: a direct translation, where a translator who is familiar with the source language composes a text for performance, and an

indirect translation, in which a theatre-maker who does not know or is not confident in the language of the original text writes a new performance script using a translation created by a language expert. If this latter text has been created expressly for such intermediate purposes, it is known in theatre circles as a 'literal translation' (see further Brodie 2018a). This terminology should not, however, be associated with the more-or less word-level translations, pejoratively named 'trots', 'cribs' or 'ponies', employed by 'target text authors' requiring a linguistic 'informant' (Washbourne 2013: 613). Literal translations for theatrical use are specialist documents that provide their users with targeted information to assist in creating a performance text – and a performance. My analysis of Helen Rappaport's literal translation for Martin Crimp reveals her inclusion of contextual information, such as performance histories, translation publication history, the definitive source text, the playwright's dramatic and literary oeuvre, theatre conventions in the source culture, along with explanations of references to contemporary figures and literary allusions (Brodie 2018b: 214-215). Most significantly - and disruptively for the concept of literal translation as a simplistic activity and product – Rappaport documents the nuance of her translation decisions. One illustration is the line, 'I feel completely shattered [broken to pieces]', in which she supports her choice of translation with a more literal transposition of the original Russian in square brackets (Brodie 2018b: 215)). In my view, these theatrical literal translations could more accurately be named 'dramaturgical translations', recognizing their value, precision and significance within the theatre translation process.

Acknowledging dramaturgy within translation activity also highlights the role of the dramaturg more generally in theatrical artistic decisions. According to Katalin Trencsényi, the work of dramaturgs is that of 'professionals engaged in a dynamic dialogue-relationship with a theatre-maker [...]; a collaborative, hermeneutical, facilitating role that is characterised by a high level of communication' (Trencsényi 2015: xxi). This activity can

range between archiving, critiquing, curating, drama development, mentoring and even actively translating. Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt note that a dramaturg allocated to a production can expect to be ‘working with the director in rehearsal, probably offering advice on textual changes, researching contextual information, offering comment on the evolving work’ (Turner and Behrndt 2008: 7). This role may sometimes be filled by a freelance professional dramaturg; some theatres outside the UK, such as Internationaal Theater Amsterdam, include dramaturgs among their permanent staff, who are also credited as translators in relevant productions. In larger UK theatres these duties fall to theatre Literary Departments but in a small theatre company members of the creative team will combine dramaturgical research with their directing and production tasks. Dramaturgical or literary input not only relates to the development of a text for performance however, but also to the creation and selection of dramatic texts and performance. The National Theatre’s expansion of its Literary Department in 2015 to become the New Work Department, leading all its artistic development ‘including new play commissions, workshopping of devised projects, and new treatments of classic texts’ (National Theatre 2019), signals the important role of dramaturgy in programming and development of productions. With regard to translation, professional literary staff members seek out, research and advise on potential plays to be translated (or retranslated), translation methodology and the translator and writer to be engaged. These overlapping activities demonstrate that translation and dramaturgy are complimentary functions that can on occasion be accomplished by a single individual.

Ultimately, the decision as to how a translation should be approached when staging a play from a language other than that of the actors and audience falls to the artistic director of the producing theatre company. The choice is likely to be influenced by both artistic and budgetary factors. Most organisations, if they have the financial resources, wish to commission a bespoke translation, and this will clearly be necessary where the play under

consideration has not previously been translated into the relevant language. Indeed, the question of how such a play emerges for production is itself problematic, especially if it is written in a language lesser spoken among the receiving culture; in such circumstances decision-makers have to rely on reports from contacts in the relevant source culture or find local speakers of the source language to review the text (see Aston and O’Thomas 2015: 39-41). The method of translation is therefore dependent to some extent on the availability of experts in the source language who have a reputation for composing performable text in the target language. Commissioners of translations for London theatre prioritize theatrical writing over linguistic ability; this is often the reason provided for opting for the indirect route through a literal translation, although the full decision-making process is more nuanced and depends on the identities and networks of the relevant theatre practitioners (see further Brodie 2018c: Ch. 4). Margherita Laera points to the ‘lack of diversity in the British cultural system – from behind-the-scenes-workforce to artists, audiences, and reviewers’ that results in London theatre failing to represent the local range of languages and cultures on stage adequately (Laera 2018: 384). Similarly, the variety of languages from which translations are regularly performed tends to be restricted to those of the dramatic canon (for example, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish). The playwrights belonging to that canon are also disproportionately represented, as Gunilla Anderman notes in her description of Chekhov and Ibsen as ‘honorary British dramatists’ (Anderman 2005: 8) (and as was evident from the examples I provided in my earlier discussion on the target users of translated texts). This focus on canonical texts in translation is not restricted to the British stage, however, as shown by recent studies of the ‘wide panorama of Chekhovian inspirations’ (Clayton and Meerzon 2013: 2) and the global impact of performances of Ibsen’s plays (Fischer-Lichte *et al.* 2011).

In London, the general pattern for translation methodology is that contemporary plays and those from less frequently represented languages are translated into English using the direct route whereas new productions of older work by canonical dramatists are more likely to be written by English-speaking playwrights based on a literal translation. There are, however, abundant examples of deviation from this generalised rule. A connecting factor between all the individuals engaged in the translation process, however, is that they are specialist theatre practitioners. Playwrights who create performance texts based on literal translations are frequently seasoned adaptors of theatrical texts; this is true of the playwright Cordelia Lynn, mentioned above, whose *Hedda Tesman* ('after' Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*) was produced at the Chichester Festival Theatre in 2019, and who also received a staging of her version of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* at the Almeida Theatre in London in the same year. Literal translators are frequently theatre specialists as well as linguists; Helen Rappaport, who has provided literal translations into English for all of Chekhov's extant plays, is representative of other practitioners in this field who have additionally worked as actors. Direct translators combine their specialism in the source language with playwriting and adaptation. Christopher Hampton, for example, translates directly from French and German, and productions of his translations from both languages were represented on the London stage in 2019. These included the contemporary French playwright Florian Zeller's *The Son* first at the Kiln Theatre before moving to the Duke of York's, and his adaptation of the Austro-Hungarian playwright Ödön von Horváth's novel *Youth Without God* at the Coronet Theatre. Hampton is also a playwright and screenwriter. These illustrations give some indication of the circulation within the theatrical field of creative writing, translation and performance. They also demonstrate the blurring of the lines between these activities.

One effect of the hazy distinctions in translating for theatre is the lack of consistency in British theatrical terminologies relating to performed texts of plays initially composed in a

language other than English. The playwright and adaptor Tanya Ronder rehearses some of the regularly used variants – ‘translation, version, new version, free version, inspired by, taken from, after, adapted, co-adapted, loosely adapted’ – before reaching the conclusion that ‘the label is simply an agreement reached between writers, theatres, agents and estates [...] it is a sliding scale of categories with no real absolutes’ (Ronder 2017: 203). In my view, this preponderance of terms demonstrates an effort on the part of the theatre industry to acknowledge the differing approaches to theatre translation and the range of practitioners and specialists participating in the production of a translated play. The all too frequent disappearance of the label ‘translation’, however, disguises the essential underpinning movement between languages. This has ethical consequences, as Laera underlines in her critique of translation in theatre: ‘Only those translations that remark themselves *as translations* can do the work of uprooting and regrounding that is necessary to resist cultural narcissism’ (Laera 2019: 51; her emphasis). The strongly target-focused nature of translating for theatre, evident from commissioning to performance, runs the risk of reducing the source text and culture to symbolic representation (such as the ubiquity of the samovar in productions of period Russian plays). As I have suggested, theatre translation is a highly collective activity; the weighting of the contributions of the participants affects the balance between source and target in the performed translation. Investigating collaborative activity in theatre translation therefore sheds further light on the theatre translation process.

4 Collaborative Theatre and Translation

The explicitly collaborative nature of theatre and performance makes theatre translation distinctive among translation types and methodologies. The embodiment of text is an integral element of the performance process, which consequently feeds through to the translation process both during the preparation of the translation and then rehearsing and modifying the translated text for performance. As I have suggested, a range of practitioners contribute to

that embodiment. Many of these practitioners are also users of the text: directors, dramaturgs, design and production teams, actors. These practitioners may not contribute directly to the code-switching element of a translation, but they are potential co-producers to the extent that they influence the text selected. I gave examples earlier of translations that were written with specific actors in mind and of actors participating in the research and development of a translation. Moreover, directors and dramaturgs are party to these modifications inasmuch as they plan, direct and advise on the detailed trialling of text through rehearsal. Design and production teams may also request amendments to a performance text if needed to accommodate physical factors such as scene and lighting arrangements or moving actors on and off stage. Such alterations are more likely to involve cutting text or inserting stage directions, but are still relevant to the performance element of the script.

Furthermore, theatre foregrounds an element of intersemiotic translation. Gay McAuley observes that '[a]ctors in rehearsal explore the text to find places where it is open to intervention, and the move, gesture, or action they choose then confers meaning upon the words in question' (McAuley 1999: 225). Physical performance can thus be used to support the communication of a translated text; but it may also supplement or replace spoken text. McAuley asserts that 'in the theatre, speech becomes a spatial function: [...] the meanings created by the words are shaped, even determined, by the spatial factors inherent in the performance reality' (op cit: 95-96). Theatre space and performance thus participate in the creation and communication of the performance text, which is itself only one element of the whole production: the *mise en scène*. The holistic nature of this crucial constituent of theatre, defined as the stage setting and 'all other related aspects of the spatial and temporal order of theatrical performance' (Postlewait 2010: 396), indicates not only the extent of collaboration in creating performance but also the function of text as only one of a wider set of theatrical

components. Theatre translation is shaped by these parameters. The translator is thus one of a number of theatre practitioners and theatrical roles contributing to the performed text.

However, the methods and timelines by which translators add their contribution to the collaborative activity around creating a performed translation vary considerably, as indeed do the contributions of other practitioners. One particularly co-operative theatrical form is devised theatre, which ‘depends on the participation of all the producing group in all or most stages of the creative process’ (Kershaw 2010: 164). Such theatre practices seek to remove the hierarchies of theatre production, developing performance through rehearsal workshops in which actors and other creative practitioners (which might also include writers and translators) contribute to a performance formula that can be reproduced with regularity, although it may retain an element of improvisation and vary between performances. In such circumstances the translator’s input would include a higher level of immediacy than would usually be the case, although potentially less representation in the eventual performance, because the words spoken on stage may vary. In more traditional forms of production, where the script is prescribed, a translator is more likely to be active in the textual elements of a production rather than the action. Laera notes that ‘[a] large majority of makers in western theatre agree that it is best practice to produce a stage translation in a rehearsal context [...]’. However, that is not always the case and many Europe-based companies rely on pre-existing translations’ (Laera 2019: 35). The extent of the translator’s collaboration therefore depends to some extent on finances: whether a production’s budget extends to commissioning a new translation and paying for the translator’s time in rehearsal. In cases where there is an indirect translation, it is more likely to be the adapting playwright who attends rehearsal; the literal translator may well only meet fellow performance artists as a member of the audience on press night. Translation collaboration in such circumstances is a distant extension of the main collaborative activity for the production.

There is no doubt that the indirect translation route problematizes the concept of theatre translation as collaboration. Susanna Witt has concluded with regard to indirect translation practices unrelated to theatre that the notion of intermediate texts for translation is ‘multifaceted and paradoxical. It [...relativizes] the very concept of translation, and, perhaps even more importantly, of the translator, continuously informing discourses of professionalization and status’ (Witt 2017: 178). In theatrical literal translation, translational input is sequential rather than concurrent and the balance of authority in the performed text shifts from the translating linguist to the adapting playwright, a shift that is perpetuated paratextually (in theatre publicity, programmes and published texts, for example) and often, by the granting of copyright to the adapting playwright, legally. Nevertheless, the key role of the literal translation in the transfer between languages points to the centrality of translation even in circumstances where the term ‘translation’ and the activity of the translator may be publicly overlooked. Examining the role of the translator within the wider scope of theatre translation activity prompts a reassessment of translation in relation to more extended forms of creative production.

5 Translation, Retranslation and Adaptation

A review of the vocabulary used to describe translated theatre texts provides a theoretical steer towards broader areas of translation theory, and suggests how theatre translation assists in an examination of the borders of translation. One of the most recurring terms attached to theatre texts that have been transferred from another language is ‘adaptation’, and indeed, the connection between translation and adaptation in theatre is the subject of critical analysis and debate. Differing perceptions of adaptation and translation can mirror the ‘belles infidèles’ debate fundamental to translation studies since Gilles Ménage (1613-1692) applied the term to the very free translations made of the classics by Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt (1606-1664) (Giroud 2010: 1216): is it possible to represent a translated text in a way that is both beautiful

and faithful to its source? However, as Katja Krebs remarks in relation to the disciplines of translation studies and adaptation studies in the context of theatre and film, '[s]uch closely intertwined areas need to encounter each other's methodologies and perspectives [...]. Once it has become clear that we are dealing with converging agendas [...] the merging of ideas and the emergence of creative practices will challenge current assumptions and prejudices in terms of both adaptation and translation' (Krebs 2015: 6). Theatre models of collaborative translation test the boundaries of adaptation and translation in their creative practices, although the weighting of the various roles within co-operative activity remains indistinct. Laurence Raw recognizes the problems in attempting to differentiate cognitively between the processes of adaptation and translation: 'If we view adaptation and translation as transformative acts involving individuals as well as the communities they inhabit [...] it follows that any definition of either term would be perpetually subject to renegotiation' (Raw 2017: 502). Even so, the theatre translation practices I describe are processes of negotiation and renegotiation; resolution is found in a visible act of communication: a performance. In considering the relationship between translation and adaptation, it is pertinent to investigate whether there is a point at which extremities of adaptation become detached from translation. J. Douglas Clayton and Yana Meerzon argue that 'a dramatic adaptation rests somewhere between the actual translation of the play from one language into another [...] and creating a new work inspired by the original', but conclude that 'no matter how close/far the target text deviates from its source, adaptation takes pleasure in masking and unmasking the presence of the original in the target text' (Clayton and Meerzon 2013: 7-8). This playfulness between the target and the source texts resonates particularly strongly in theatre and, in my view, creates a resilient link irrespective of the range of versions and extensions through which a translated play may traverse. Linda Hutcheon, in outlining a continuum model of adaptation travelling from literary translation at one end to 'expansions' such as

sequels and prequels at the other, considers that this line has the ‘advantage of offering a way to think about various responses to a prior story; it positions adaptations specifically as (re-)interpretations and (re-)creations’ (Hutcheon 2013: 171-172). Thinking about the iterative quality of adaptation, and its consequence for translation provides an opportunity to engage further with theoretical assessments of retranslation.

Theatre provides many illustrations of multiple translations of classic texts; ancient tragedy in English translation maintains ‘a particularly strong presence in modern theatre’ and the translation and adaptation of Greek and Latin plays is the subject of a distinct discipline: classical reception studies (see further Brodie and Cole 2017: 11-13). Translation studies engagements with retranslation have tended to view translations in a linear relationship stemming from the original text with, on the one hand, Antoine Berman’s hypothesis whereby each new translation moves closer to the source text (1990), and on the other, Lawrence Venuti’s concern that because retranslations ‘call attention to their competing interpretation’ with previous versions, they risk ‘effacing the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text to serve a domestic cultural politics’ (2004: 32-33). Françoise Massardier-Kenney, however, notes that ‘a retranslation does not necessarily stem from a weakness, deficiency, inadequacy in previous translations or in the source text but from the often unacknowledged power of translation to constitute a text as literature and to make visible the process through which literature is constituted as such’ (2015: 73). In theatre, where retranslation is so frequent, and so varied in form and method, translation and retranslation are part of the creative exercise of theatre-making, with each new example offering a different perspective on the original play.

I would argue therefore that theatre employs translation as a tool to display the creative process of theatre-making. The problem is that this tool is itself an intricate mechanism comprising a range of components that should be more visibly named. The term ‘adaptation’

perhaps conveys the collective nature of the endeavour that is assembled in creating a piece of translated theatre, but does not reflect the movement between languages that underpins the creative process. Laera sees ‘the difference between translation and adaptation as historically and socially determined, not as structural’ (2019: 25). Greater advocacy for the term, ‘translation’, among theatre-makers could deflect some of this pre-determination. Jean Graham-Jones, herself a translator, scholar and theatre artist, considers that ‘there always exists a spectrum of adaptation across which we translators and our collaborators range, and our approaches to translation vary as much as the works we translate’ Graham-Jones 2017: 137). Graham-Jones therefore proposes the use of the adjective ‘translational’ to describe both artistic and scholarly theatrical work,

not only as a way of acknowledging the always-present and always-fluid relationality in translation but also as a means of opening up the category of translation itself to consider not only the linguistic and cultural text – the playscript [...] – but also other challenges faced in translating, translocating, and adapting a play to a different performance environment’ (op cit: 137-138)

Positioning translation more visibly in the theatre translation process remains a challenge, but a challenge that throws light on the role of translation and translators more widely, in theory and practice.

6 Conclusion

The close examination of translating for theatre reveals a complex system of activity with multiple participants, a range of resources and expertise and a variety of outputs and users.

The constant factor within this structure is the element of performance, which is inscribed in the source text, the target text, and the collaborative transformative process between the two. Participants in a theatre translation project have performance as their primary objective and, as I have discussed, even where a translated theatre text is published, it both echoes and records performance. The overlapping nature of the users and generators of a translated theatre text creates a network of agents contributing to the translation process, but also blurs the lines between contributors, and consequently between the component parts of the creation of a performed translation. The interlingual translator plays an essential part within the translation syndicate, but that role may be less visible and less synchronically collaborative than other practitioners'. This is most likely to be the case for literal translators even though, as I demonstrate, their contribution to the performance element takes both dramaturgical and translational forms. Theatre translation thus highlights the nature of translation within collaborative and intersemiotic contexts, and consequently the linkage of translation and adaptation. Detailed examination demonstrates that theatre translation is a creative activity pushing against boundaries of translation, retranslation and adaptation, but translation still needs to be foregrounded as a term, activity and concept within theatre and, accordingly, within communication more generally between genres, modes and cultures.

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