

“I’M THE EMPTY STAGE WHERE VARIOUS ACTORS ACT OUT VARIOUS PLAYS” – THEATRE TRANSLATORS’ VIEW OF THEIR WORK

Sirkku Aaltonen¹

¹University of Vaasa

Abstract: When theatre translators are commissioned to translate a play, they know the stage it is intended for, the director and sometimes even the actors. In a small country, theatre translation has always been significant, and even today translated plays account for around half of the annual performances on the Finnish stage. This situation has triggered off the following piece of research into how theatre translators themselves see their own role in the preparation of a production and, also, how closely their work follows the one that actors do in constructing characters. The two questions set for the analysis were: 1) what is theatre translators’ experience of their physical participation in the construction of a performance?; and 2) how far does their psychological involvement go into the lives of the play’s characters? I drew my material from two collected works of theatre translators’ self-reflections that I have edited in Finland. Of the two compilations, I selected 27 articles written by theatre translators. My method was Critical Discourse Analysis, and my toolbox consisted of *discourse*, *repertoire*, (*theme*), *topic* and *metaphorical narratives*. The analysis revealed repertoires that consisted of the physical participation in the production process that fell mostly in the category of *Exclusion* or *Liminality*, and to a much lesser extent to that of *Inclusion*. The answers to the second question concerning the psychological involvement in the lives of the play’s characters fell mostly in the repertoire which I labelled as *the Brechtian Verfremdung*, or *Distancing* and somewhat less to the repertoire of *Emotional Recall*, or *Memory*, of *the Stanislavski Method*.

Keywords: Theatre translators’ self-reflections; Theatre translator in the rehearsal room; Theatre translation as acting; Theatre translation



Introduction

The title of my article originates from the famous twentieth-century Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888 - 1935), who “had no major achievements to his name” when he died, but whose afterlife made him one of the most significant Portuguese writers of the century. I have chosen his aphorism as the title of my article because it describes the work of theatre translators so accurately. Theatre translators are such empty stages when they start working on a manuscript: they need to create the internal world of the play and the people who inhabit it before the director, actors and other members of the ensemble can continue towards a production. Translators are like Pessoa in that they seem to have “a history without life”, but unlike Pessoa, they seldom have an afterlife either (see Kirsch, 2017).

In what follows, I propose to search for answers to two questions. Firstly, I will explore the translators’ own experience of their physical participation, positioning, or status, in the construction of the performance for which they have been commissioned to create a blueprint. Do they feel that they are taking part (or allowed/expected to take part) in the theatrical ensemble as equal members, asked questions, or invited to discuss the text with the production team, the director, the dramaturg, and the actors in the rehearsal room? Are the translators given an opportunity to discuss the text, the verbal as well as the non-verbal one, with the actors? Or are the translators seen as outsiders whose only task is to deliver material for the theatre ensemble and then leave the stage? Secondly, I will study the translators’ approach to the world of the play and the people who inhabit it. Do they get psychologically drawn into the characters’ emotions, thoughts, and motivations behind their actions? How closely do they resemble Pessoa, who attributed much of his writing to *heteronyms*, fully fledged characters, who were given their own biographies, philosophies, and literary styles? Pessoa even imagined encounters among them and allowed them to comment on one another’s work. Although he himself was empty,

he needed a stage, where his created selves could meet and interact (Kirsch, 2017). Theatre translators can, as I see it, choose between two approaches to the construction of the character in a play they are translating. The first is the *Brechtian Approach*, in which they will take distance from the text and treat characters in their capacity as bystanders. In this approach, they will apply *Verfremdung*, or distancing, for character creation. The second would be a Pessoa-like approach, which can be compared to the *Stanislavski's Method* or *System*, whereby the translators become the characters, rely on their own *Emotional Memory*, and recall it when needed.

The study draws its significance from the fact that translations have played, and still play a significant role in the Finnish theatre. In fact, without translations, there might not be any theatre at all in Finland as the country was the backyard of touring theatre companies as well as the rehearsal room for Swedish actors who wanted to gain professional competence on stage. The first theatre troupes touring Finnish towns performed translations—although not into Finnish. The first theatre performances were translations into Swedish, the actors were Swedish speakers, and the stage was Swedish. As the theatre institution was all Swedish, most Finnish speakers (or Finnish-speaking actors) had no access to its language. As so often is the case in colonial contexts, Finnish was considered the language of the peasants, which did not have the potential to house great masterpieces from countries like German or English. It has taken a long time for Finnish theatre enthusiasts to establish a Finnish stage with Finnish actors, performing Finnish drama. Plays arrived from other European countries, usually through Swedish. Even at present, Finnish theatre would be much poorer and barren if translated plays were removed from its repertoires. All new trends and ideas would have arrived much later, if at all, and Finnish playwrights would have lost their important source of inspiration.

My material consists of two collected volumes of self-reflections by translators, which I will analyse using a Critical Discourse Analysis toolbox. Regarding the structure of the article, I will present my material and method first and then describe the

backdrop of the position of translations in the Finnish theatre. The central part of the article is devoted to the analysis and discussion of the findings. These will be tied together in the conclusion.

Finnish translators' self-reflections: material of the study

Here I examine the translators' discourses on theatre translation when they had been asked to write about their work. The request was expressed in a way which gave them the opportunity to choose the point of view and the general approach as they wanted. These have been compiled in two collections which I have edited and published. All articles have either been written in Finnish or translated into it. The first one, *Käämetyt Illusiot* [translated illusions] came out in 1998 and is a collection of selfreflections by Finnish translators commissioned to translate foreign plays into Finnish for the Finnish stage. The other compilation, *Matkalippu Maailmalle* [a ticket to the world] came out in 2010 and contains articles by foreign translators who have been translating Finnish plays for Swedish, English, Spanish, Russian, Slovak, Hungarian, French, Chinese, German, and other stages. Neither the number of plays nor the length of time was taken into account. The findings of the analysis would have been quite different had it been conducted similarly to its British counterpart, *Stages of Translation*, edited by David Johnston (1996), as the praxis in Britain is very different from that in Finland. British theatres have a two-tier system of translators, whereby they usually commission someone who knows the source language and culture to prepare the first version, which will usually then be handed over to a well-known British playwright, who will write the stage version and whose name appears in the credits. These playwrights might have only a basic knowledge of the source language, if at all, but their name might take priority over that of the "original" playwright (too difficult to remember) and be used to sell the play to audiences. Moreover, in Britain, translations represent only a minute fraction of theatre repertoires,

whereas in Finland they may have, in some years, formed more than half of the repertoire of plays offered to Finnish audiences (Aaltonen, 2020).

The first compilation, *Käännetyt Illuusiot* (Aaltonen, 1998) consists of 18 articles, of which 13 have been written by theatre translators (the other five articles were written by researchers and a theatre agency). Of the 13 translators:

6 are dramaturgs by education

6 are also themselves playwrights or writers

4 have also directed plays

1 translator had no other link with theatre except 30 years' experience as a theatre translator

The translators, therefore, represent agents who are familiar with the conventions of Finnish theatre from several angles. The second compilation, *Matkalippu Maailmalle* (Aaltonen, 2010), includes 19 writers of whom 14 wrote in their capacity as theatre translators. Two articles excluded from the compilation for editorial reasons were written by playwrights and concerned their reflections on having their own work translated, one joint article was about work involved in compiling, translating and editing an anthology, and two represented views of dramaturgs on the requirements for a good theatre translation. A few contributors had also translated Finnish literary works, and four had been awarded for their work as translators (both drama and prose). None of the translators had any educational background in Theatre Studies, and they had usually learnt their job through experience. Many writers had also participated in courses on theatre translation held in Finland. For a small linguistic community, it is not always easy to find translators who can translate from Finnish, which makes these translators very important for Finnish playwrights who are aiming at foreign productions of their plays. These translators, often themselves foreign nationals, are often the ones to attract theatre practitioners' attention to Finnish plays in their home countries. My material consists thus, all in all, of 27 articles about theatre translation which I have analysed qualitatively for this article.

My starting point for the analysis was listening to theatre translators to gain insight into their experience and thoughts of their work. Despite their important input in some theatrical systems like the Finnish one, they still tend to remain the invisible agents whose voice is never heard. Moreover, translation for the stage is still seen to be an anomaly, different from literary translation, and a field where common translational norms do not apply. Still, when discussing the findings of the analysis of theatre translators' self-reflections, it is important to bear in mind what Gideon Toury (2012) has remarked about translators themselves as sources of information about the "norms and conventions" in governing their translation:

There may [...] be gaps, even contradictions, between explicit arguments and demands, on the one hand, and actual behaviour, on the other [...]. Even with respect to the translators themselves, intentions do not necessarily concur with any declaration of intent (which is often put down post factum anyway, when the translation act itself is already over); and the way the 'real', possibly concealed intentions are then realized in practice may well constitute a further, third group of data [in addition to translations themselves and expressed intentions. [...] This process would involve the comparison of various normative pronouncements with each other, as well as their repeated confrontation with the patterns revealed by (the results of) translational behaviour and the norms reconstructed from them (Toury, 2012, p. 88-89).

As the research data is relatively small, the findings need to be seen as indicative. I will not give numbers or percentages, but rather discuss the different discourses translators have constructed when discussing their work.

Theatre translation as seen by translators: deconstruction of descriptions

The theoretical framework of the present study is Discourse Analysis and, in particular its socio-political approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA distinguishes itself from Discourse Analysis (DA) in that it deals with power structures such as inequality, which makes it a suitable tool for the deconstruction of translators' discourse on their physical position in the theatrical ensemble as well as their psychological approach to the inner world of the characters in the play they are translating. The philosopher Michel Foucault (1972) regards "discourse" as consisting of a group of statements belonging to the same "discursive formation", and these statements form the reality they speak about. The way theatre translators describe their work constructs the event for them; in other words, it constructs one version, or reality of it. Theatre programmes might add the translator's name in their text almost as a side-remark and, thus construct another reality of it. Discourse extends beyond a single sentence; it consists of the overall meanings conveyed by language in the social, cultural, political, and historical context and forms versions, or realities, for us. When we conduct Critical Discourse Analysis, we look at meanings underlying the actual written statements hoping that our findings will help to cause a change (see Mills 2004).

Critical Discourse Analysis is used to conduct research on the use of language in context to investigate a wide variety of social problems that affect individuals negatively (Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2008, p. 2). Theatre translators' experience of their work derives from their own subjective standpoint, which this article aims to deconstruct. If translators are of utmost importance to a theatre institution, does this show in their status and does this significance reflect on their perception of it?

When performing the analysis of translators' discourse of their status in the theatrical ensemble, I will focus particularly on the metaphors and topics theatre translators use in describing the work

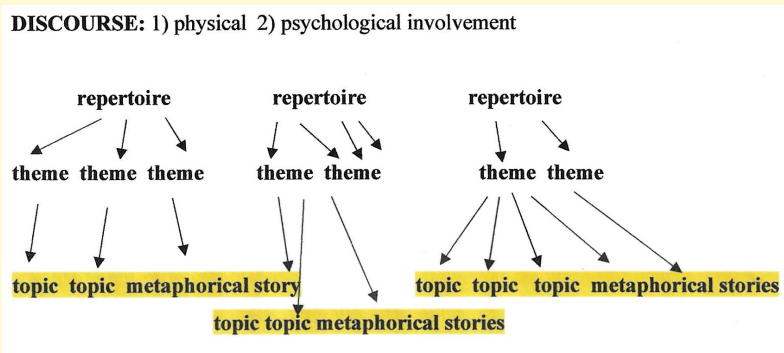
they do. In these details, I search for thematic coherence, and if these appear regularly, they are seen to form *repertoires*, which, in turn construct meanings. *Repertoires* have been identified by Wetherell & Potter (1988, p. 172) as “[...] the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena”. They are the recognisable patterns, formed by recurring themes. Themes are individual statements about an event or an object, and they recur to form repertoires. Foucault (1972) described them as occurring irregularly over time. When they are constructing one and the same object, they form groups which are *discursive formations*. When identified, repertoires can be classified according to their themes and named. As the themes recur and are supported by other related themes, the pattern they form will become clearer and the repertoire can be named. To summarise the available tools for conducting CDA, the largest units are *discourses* that construct the reality for us. They are formed by *repertoires*, that is, certain recurrent patterns revealed through intensive reading in the form of *themes*, *topics*, and *metaphors*. *Themes* are large abstract units of meaning which have a generally descriptive purpose. They are constructed by *topics* which are concrete and event-based and completed finally by *metaphorical stories* which give detailed accounts of current events and aim at symbolising the theme (Van Dijk, 1987).

In search for the answer to my second question concerning the translators’ involvement in the internal world of the play they are translating as well as psychologically in the characters who inhabit that world, I also read the articles discursively paying attention to the topics and metaphorical narratives which the translators use when describing their working process. My aim is to explore through these topics how translators become drawn to the theatricality and timeliness (here and now) of the texts, and how translation may produce somatic and embodied subjectivity through mimetic and identification process comparable to those of performance. Translators may reach into the corporeal desire to be like the characters, to take on shapes and forms unlike their own. They

may also take distance from the characters and just prepare raw material for the director and actors who will continue the process towards a production. I am interested in two opposite approaches that translators may apply to their translation work, and these two approaches are very similar to those that the actors' technique may involve. In *the Brechtian approach*, the translators will take distance from the text. As they translate the play, they themselves do not become the characters but instead narrate the characters' emotions, thoughts, and actions as if they were bystanders. If, however, the translators adopt the *Stanislavski Method*, they themselves become the characters; they try to understand and feel the emotions of the characters and do this by drawing on their own life experience.

Figure 1 below summarises the research method of the present study:

Figure 1: Deconstructing the translators' discourse



Source: The author

Figure 1 illustrates how discourses construct the translators' comprehension of reality. These discourses concern both their physical and psychological involvement in play production. They are constructed by means of repertoires, certain meaningful combinations, that is thematically linked event-based topics and metaphorical narratives.

For example, in deconstructing the discourse of theatre translators' statuses in the rehearsal room, we might find that one of the *repertoires* with which translators make meaning of this status may be that of total exclusion. A *theme* constructs the repertoire of exclusion through giving the translators the feeling that they are not welcome in the rehearsal room, or that they are not consulted about details in the lines of the actors. A *topic* in this chain may, then, be a single experience of a change made in the lines, which the translator finds culturally incompatible, but which will be kept in. Metaphorically, a translator may feel that s/he is allowed to be heard but not seen, like a surgeon conducting an operation and leaving the theatre as soon as her work is done. People outside expect the patient to look just as s/he has always looked (a Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 34).

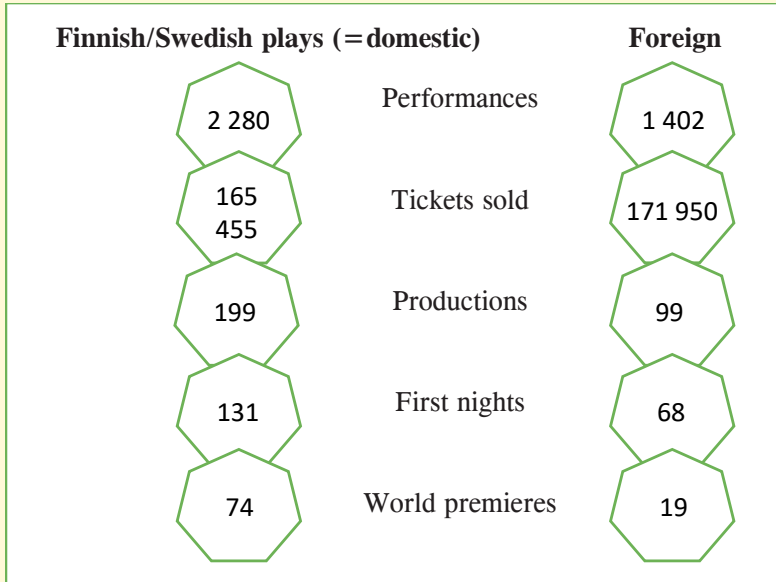
The stage in periphery: translated!

Finland is a peripheral country language-wise with just under six million speakers. It is, therefore, easy to understand why translations have always played an important role in opening a window to the world where ideas and inspiration have flown in. Finland could never have become self-sufficient in creating different genres and themes for its theatre repertoires. Translated plays have also always been an important source of inspiration to Finnish playwrights.

The first Finnish-language play, performed in 1650 by a group of students in an academic celebration to honour the inauguration of the newly appointed rector of the university in the then capital Turku, was already a translation. It had come to Finland through Swedish, into which it had presumably been translated from German. The first professional stage, The Finnish Theatre, was established half-way through the 19th century, and the first performance starred a native Swedish actor who could not speak or understand Finnish but had learned her lines in Finnish though

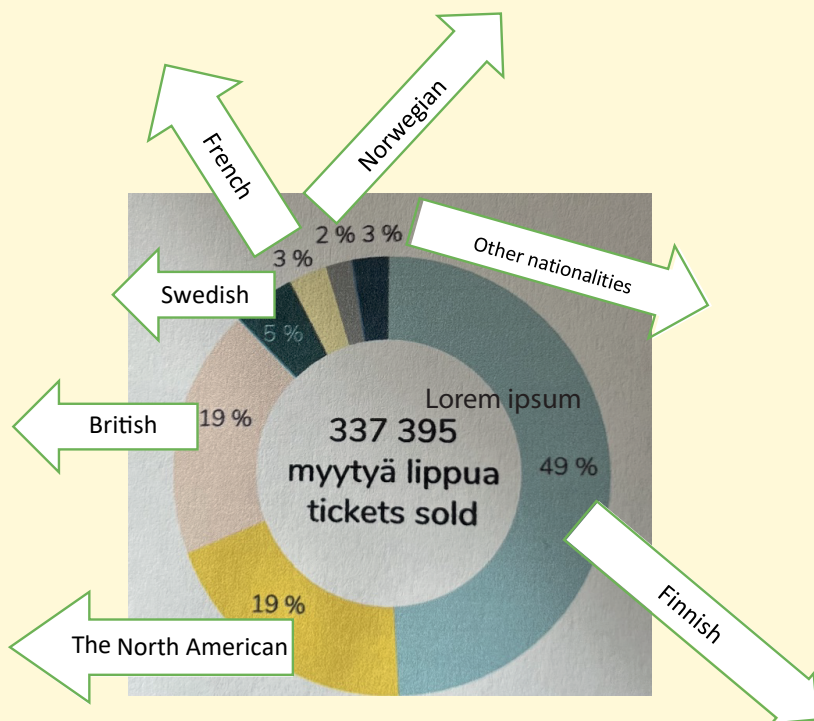
a Swedish translation (Aaltonen & Jänis, 2007). Finnish theatre is now around 150 years old, and still, translations form annually some 50% of theatre repertoires as can be seen from the following diagram (Stara & Volmari, 2021):

Figure 2: Theatre repertoires 2020/2021 (personal archives)



Source: The author

The source countries have stayed the same ever since WWII when Anglo-American drama started dominating the translations. Plays in English have been complemented by countries with an extensive national repertoire, such as France, and to a lesser extent Spain. Some drama has also been brought in from the Nordic countries, mostly Sweden. Russian classics are also often seen in the Finnish repertoires (Aaltonen, 2007, p. 53-54). The following figure shows the shares by tickets sold of different source languages according to the author's nationality in 2020/2021:

Figure 3. Tickets sold in 2020/2021 by author's nationality

Source: The author

The most recent theatrical year in the statistics is that from the autumn 2020 and the spring 2021 and, as usual, the English language drama has occupied the largest share of Finland's theatre repertoires, while domestic drama has accounted for less than half of what Finnish theatre audiences have been offered. The number of Swedish plays, although not very high, can partly be explained by the number of Swedish theatres in Finland (Stara & Volmari, 2021).

All this shows that theatre translators are as valuable to Finnish theatre as are domestic playwrights, which makes it important to

have a closer look at the physical involvement of theatre practitioners in the rehearsal room but also their psychological involvement in the world they are creating for the stage.

It must be noted that in Finnish theatre, translators are not mere linguists who master both the source and target languages and cultures. Unlike their British counterparts, Finnish theatre translators are expected to deliver texts which are ready for the rehearsal room. Small adjustments may be made, but the script is expected to be ready to be handed over to the rest of the ensemble. Apart from linguistic and cultural expertise, they also need to have the skills of a dramaturg and, to some extent, of actors as well. Only large dramaturgical alterations, such as leaving out scenes or characters, changing the setting, changing the order of scenes, adding material, or shortening the play are done by the director with/without the translator.

Theatres commission and pay for the translations a one-off pay, which varies from 4,000 to 6,000 € for each play, although it is known that some novices may only get some 1,000€. Musicals are more costly, usually from 15,000 to 20,000€ as they often need two translators, one for the lyrics and the other for the dialogue. With the receipt of the payment, the translators give up the copyright. While Finnish playwrights need to write approximately two plays a year if they want to make a living from that, theatre translators need to have a constant flow of translations to be able to live on their work¹.

As a country with a relatively small number of theatres or large theatre audiences, it is understandable that Finland has only a handful of established playwrights and theatre translators. However, playwrights, directors and actors often become celebrated

¹ Telephone conversation 22/8/2022 with Hinriikka Lindqvist (Nordic Drama Corner) CEO & Finnish and foreign rights. Nordic Drama Corner is the largest theatrical agency in Finland, representing many leading Finnish playwrights, and negotiating rights for translations of foreign drama with an extensive international network of theatre agencies. Available at <https://www.dramacorner.fi/en>, Cited 27/8/2022.

representatives of their profession, but translators are very seldom present at the final bow. The following findings from the analysis conducted give some indication of how Finnish theatre translators perceive their work.

Physical presence in the external world of the rehearsal room

I selected as my material two collections of translators' accounts of their work in the theatre, 27 articles in total, which I read discursively to find answers to two questions. The first question concerned the context of theatre and the rehearsal room and aimed at exploring the translators' experience of their physical positioning, or status, in the construction of the performance for which they had been commissioned to translate the script. The second question was aimed at the translators' psychological involvement in the internal world of the play, as in how much of themselves they gave to the characters and the world of the play. The two extreme approaches in the latter case were to be labelled as *the Brechtian Verfremdung* and *the Stanislavski Method*.

The translators' discourse about their own status and psychological involvement in creating the world of the play was deconstructed by identifying through intensive reading the thematic topics and metaphorical narratives which were the building blocks of the repertoires. That was done in order to identify some of the recurrent patterns that translators used when describing their work. The repertoires rose clearest from the experiences of the translators who worked in the Finnish theatre. The translators' discourse about their position or status in the rehearsal room fell into three repertoires, which I labelled as *Exclusion*, *Liminality* and *Inclusion*.

Exclusion: translator as a disturbance or nobody

Translators in all fields of literary activity have almost throughout their history been regarded as inferior to the creator of the source text. As referred to above, a striking case of this is English theatre, where an English playwright's name (falsely credited for translating the play) may be the selling line for a play, while the foreign playwright's name appears in the advertisements and posters in smaller lettering. The name of the person who has, in fact, mediated between the two languages and cultures may have disappeared altogether. Even in a very different theatre culture such as that of Finnish theatre, exclusion from the rehearsal room is the most common repertoire used by translators to describe their position in the theatrical context. Indeed, most translators in my material felt that producers, stage directors, and actors saw them merely as a disturbance, or a nobody. In this repertoire, the themes included topics and metaphorical narratives of being an unwanted presence in the rehearsal room. As one translator has put it, it is not always clear who decides the translation strategy: the translator, playwright, publisher, or some other outsider? In the translation into English, a "foreign" language that everybody speaks, the translator felt that the others always felt that they knew better (a native English translator in Aaltonen, 2010, p. 22-23)². The translator was useful both as a source of information and as a scapegoat (a Finnish dramaturg/translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 48). This is also exemplified here: "The translator gets involved physically and emotionally in the process of preparing a text for the stage, commits himself [*sic*] a hundred percent to the process. Still, to the producer, directors, and actors, the translator is not part of the ensemble but rather a 'disturbance' or 'nobody'." (a German translator in Aaltonen, 2010, p. 37).

Some felt that the production team was prepared to accept the translator's presence at the beginning of the rehearsals but not later:

² All translations in the examples are mine.

“The translator’s presence may be desirable when the rehearsals start, and totally undesirable when the process continues. The ensemble takes over, changes the text, underlines, makes it more ‘speakable’.” (a Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 112-113). Translators were seen as facilitators who should hand in the completed script, receive their pay, then leave, and never interfere in the process taking place in the rehearsal room.

Another theme where opinions differed concerned the question of the theatre translator’s loyalty. Should the translator stay loyal only to the playwright or welcome suggestions from the members of the production team? Some felt the current praxis absurd: “The translator is a visitor [...]. Like the pianist’s page turner who obeys the pianist, the drama translator obeys the playwright only. [...] Suggestions for corrections s/he needs to take even from the janitor’s cat” (a Finnish playwright/translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 96). Some felt that the translator’s position was very shaky, and as the rehearsals started, the actors took over and decided what should be said on stage:

At first the actors welcome the translator into the ensemble and are even a little shy of him [*sic*] and even ask him some questions. Gradually they notice that the translator has come to stay, sitting next to the director. First an actress loses her nerve and asks for a change in the text. The translator refuses. The other actors join in, and the translator has lost the battle (a Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 111).

There were exceptions, however. One of the translators found the “groundwork” that directors, dramaturgs and all those involved in the production very useful, and while listening to them, the translator made careful notes of their remarks. He regarded them as very useful when he was finalising the text. He reserved himself the right to be selective as to what he would consider and what he

would ignore (a Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 67-68). A translator who translated from Finnish into English found that he needed to justify his decisions to practically everyone in the rehearsal room:

Both the director and dramaturg admired the text but also felt that the characters were distant and the language strange. I spent days with the dramaturg fine-tuning the translation. Also, the playwright wanted to be consulted about every change we made, and we ended up spending a lot of time explaining to her the solutions we had arrived at. Without her, the work would have been so much easier (An English playwright/translator in Aaltonen, 2010, p. 30).

The translator is essential in the production team, but at the same time, a nameless nobody:

[Or] the stand-in for an ice-skater whose skill must match that of the actual star, the assistant turning the pages for a performing pianist (has to obey the star pianist), a puppeteer pulling the strings attached to the puppets, a skilled ballet dancer following the agreements and instructions of a choreographer (A Finnish playwright/translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 98).

As can be seen from the above examples, the themes in the repertoire of exclusion concerned: firstly, whether translators were invited to the rehearsal room, secondly, whose voice should be heard about the translation, and thirdly, whose voice would end up on stage. The overall feeling appeared to be that the translators were generally not consulted (apart for explanations) after they had submitted the final version of the script, and if they were allowed to take part in the rehearsals, they lost the battle with all other

partakers in the process. They were expected to represent the playwright and be loyal to him/her, and if the opinions differed as to what was heard on stage, the translator lost the argument. Sometimes theatre translators were seen to be somehow in the space between the playwright and the actor: s/he was not quite the playwright nor was s/he the actor but the liminal being whose text directors fell in love with but whose work still needed a “proper” theatre practitioners’ finetuning.

In-betweenness and liminality

In their self-reflections, theatre translators often felt that they were homeless and trying to find a place between two equally important entities, sometimes even struggling to find a balance between them. A close reading of the translators’ self-reflections revealed that the space they occupied existed between themselves and the playwright, the contexts of the two texts, and between the written source text and the authentic spoken stage text. They also saw themselves sharing the space with the characters. Other minor considerations were the worlds of the two languages and cultures (ways of thinking), different emotions felt by the characters, and the beginning and the end of the play (the translator knows the end but must pretend that s/he does not at the beginning of the play). The following metaphorical narrative describes the translator as the playwright’s standby, a substitute who would be ‘standing by’ in case the person they are standing by for cannot perform. Standbys for actors do not necessarily belong to the theatrical ensemble, and they rarely need to go on stage. In the narrative below, the translator feels that he is standing by for the playwright who has created the character:

[...] [S/he] is like a standby of an ice-skater; she knows when she is watching the star practicing her programme that she will lose her skates just before the big evening, and that is why the standby has to know in every part of his/her body, the physique of the star, and every single

movement; on the big evening it is the standby who enters the limelight and nobody must notice that the star is sitting quietly on the substitute's bench and totally dependent on the performance of the standby. "Look, this is how she executes the Quadruple Lutz – there!" And after the jump, the translator thinks: "think, I could not do that myself." "And s/he is partly right." The thing is that nothing should be added to or excluded from the choreography – otherwise the translator is caught red-handed as a fake author (A Finnish playwright/translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 95-96).

The relationship between the translator and the playwright seemed to be complicated, and the translator often felt that s/he represented the playwright but without any authority. The following narrative illustrates this:

[...] [T]he translator is not quite the playwright but easily treated as such, especially if the playwright is dead. From the point of view of the ensemble s/he is a liminal being, partly with a will and presence partly a shadow of another, absent person [...]. S/he often works as the eyes and ears to the rest of the ensemble but without any authority to give orders regarding anything else but the accuracy of the text although his/her whole soul would be itching to do so. S/he is like an anonymous reliable source – our man [*sic*] inside, who, when insisted on his loyalty, without hesitation denies all others but his *fürher*, the playwright (A Finnish playwright/translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 97).

One translator felt that she was pretending that the playwright's world was hers: "[...] the translator intrudes in the playwright's world and work, translates, and steals this world to herself and pretends that it's hers" (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 34). The same translator felt that the actors in the rehearsal room could easily: "Turn into a pack of savaging wolves, especially if

the door to the sheep barn has been left open, and the lone bleeding ewe (the translator) gets no help from the farmer (the director)” (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 113).

One of the narratives described the translator’s position between the two languages and cultures:

I don’t have a translator’s head. In my head, languages, geographies and cultures exist in their separate compartments. They are like TV channels with their own programmes. Using the remote control to switch between the channels is easy. Translation between languages is extremely painful. Like being stuck in thick snow with too big skiing boots. You cannot lift your feet and move forwards. There is actually no bridge between languages. Moving from one language into another or a way of thinking to another causes no problems (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 21).

It appeared very clearly that translators felt powerless in the rehearsal room. They did not really belong to the team at all: occasionally they were treated like the playwright’s representative, but that right did not grant them any say in what happened with their text. However, they hardly ever described individual events where they might have clashed with somebody. Only in one case, the translator described the clash between the playwright (Finnish speaker) and himself (English speaker) who was supposed to translate the play into English:

The playwright criticized places in the text where I had changed words or word-order to make the English line more humorous (the play was a kind of comedy). My translation was criticized for being “sloppy” when all my word choices could not be found in the dictionary [. . .]. Also, the parentheses, such as *waiting on the rocks* were criticized as they were felt to bring to mind either “marital” crisis or the way to drink “whisky on the rocks”. [...]

my example concerns only a detail but brings up well the problems which might arise when working with a non-native speaker. Most Finns speak excellent English, but they lack the deeper knowledge of the language and culture, and the indirect meanings of certain words and expressions as well as associations, especially their commonness is unknown to them (An English translator in Aaltonen, 2010, p. 30).

Liminality was a common feeling amongst the translators. They did not have a clear position and struggled between several poles, not having authority, nor the final word, in their translation. Everyone else in the process, the playwright, director, and actors were allowed to change the text at will, and the translator, if consulted at all, always lost the battle.

Translator invited in the rehearsal room: the lucky few

Some, although unfortunately very few, felt that they were welcomed as equal members into the production team. More commonly the translators appeared to be collaborating with some individual members of the team, usually the director and/or the dramaturg.

One of the translators had a very positive experience of being a member of the in-group of the ensemble, and he felt that his voice was heard, and his opinions valued: "I was allowed to do the translation work alone in solitude, but in rehearsals and afterwards, we discussed and tried to untangle the textual grid in the ensemble, we worked out alternatives, removed and added: we worked as a team" (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 117). A couple of translators, in fact, expressed a preference to collaborate with the director and the dramaturg. Neither of the two mentioned working with actors, nor did the latter translator see the playwright as a nuisance in the team:

I decided to offer the director my translation as well as an analysis that I had based my translation on. I also expressed my willingness to come along to the rehearsals. I was welcomed with open arms, and everyone benefited. I could hear my text being spoken and acted on stage, and also noticed places that needed more work. The director and the ensemble got help in the interpretation, clarification of cultural differences, intertextual references, and above all, support in their work (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 119).

One of the translators explained why the collaboration was so useful: “Two pairs of eyes always see better than one pair. A director who has a clear vision of the text may be a burden but also a light in the dark” (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 86).

The analysis and discussion above show how the translators in my data saw their involvement in the process of constructing a stage production. They indicated in their self-reflections that they were mostly considered deliverers of raw material, and if they were given a chance to comment on the text, they were easily overruled. They were seen to be replacing the “real” non-native-speaker-playwright, who even questioned the translator’s rendering of the play in his/her native language on one occasion. Translators were liminal beings, between the playwright and the ensemble, the page and the stage, between languages and cultures. In very few cases they were invited to take part in the production team as equal members.

The second question in my analysis concerned the translators’ psychological involvement in creating the characters in the play. Like actors, they either went into the world and lives of their characters or wrote the lines for the actors to use as raw material. The dramaturgs mostly insisted that the most important thing would be to try to unearth the playwright’s way of thinking and let the actors do their work: “[...] [the translator must be aware of the fact] that s/he is translating the playwright’s intentions and thoughts and not those of the characters” (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 42).

In analysing the self-reflections of the translators discursively, two repertoires rose clearly from the topics and metaphorical narratives in them. They resembled the ways actors can choose from when they are approaching their roles. One was similar to *the Stanislavski Method* (or *System*) of relying on one's own inner emotions and feelings for *Emotional Recall*, and the other was like *the Brechtian Verfremdung*, or defamiliarization, translating scores for the actors to work on, writing instructions, or retelling the events, as bystanders.

Psychological presence in the internal world of the characters

Translators need to move from one play translation to the next very quickly to make a living from theatre translation. How much of themselves can they put into the construction of characters and their lives just to abandon them and move on to a new world almost without a break? Actors, at least, appear more than once in one and the same role, but translators have only one "performance".

There are two schools of thought concerning character construction, and which of the two schools the actors choose depends, for example, on their training as well as the stage and director they are working for. Translators have not usually any theatrical training or school of thought they would need to follow, but even so, it became clear from their self-reflections that they would approach the characterisation in a play translation very much the same way as the actors do. I labelled the two extreme methods and the repertoires that constructed them *the Brechtian Verfremdung* and *the Stanislavski Method*.

To summarise the two approaches briefly, the *Stanislavski Method* has its roots in the work of Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), a Russian theatre practitioner who started his theatre career as an actor. His greatest achievement was the development of what is now known as the *Stanislavski System* or the *Stanislavski Method*.

He believed that to make a character believable, s/he would be needed to be approached from the inside, using the real inside life of the actor and his/her *Emotional Memory*. The actor needed to start building the character of the inner thoughts, background, and beliefs [similar to Pessoa's *heteronyms* (my remark)] of this character, the actor needed to stir his/her Emotional Memory by recalling a parallel situation and evoking that when needed. The truth on stage (the scenic truth) would, however, be different from the truth of real life. An actor would create things or persons the way s/he would want the audience to believe they are (see Stanislavski's *System for Actors*, 2017). A theatre translator may use a similar method when creating the characters in a play and, in consequence, become drawn into the emotional world of the characters.

The second repertoire has its roots in the work of the German playwright and poet, Bertolt Brecht, 1898-1956, who was also a theatre practitioner. He made and shaped theatre away from the Stanislavskian naturalistic or dramatic theatre. Brecht wanted to make his audience think and believed that if the audience believed in the action onstage and became emotionally involved, they lost the ability to think and to judge. He wanted his audiences to remain objective and distant from emotional involvement so that they could make considered and rational judgements about any social comment or issues in his work. He labelled the act of distancing the audience from emotional involvement the *Verfremdungseffekt* (see "Epic Theatre and Political Theatre"). In Brecht's opinion, actors should narrate actions of another person, and to illustrate this, he used the example of an accident-eyewitness, who might imitate, for example the victim's gait but only quote what was relevant and necessary to his explanation. As the audience is not to be allowed to identify with the character, so, too, the actor is not to identify with it either (Brecht's "Epic Theatre" and "Verfremdungseffekt" techniques). In the present study, I also use the term *score*, which is generally used to refer to the notes and chords the actor is asked to play in a scene. The playwright might modify the actions, often suggest hidden intentions of the characters, and include

parenthetical instructions concerning the actors' movements (see Example 1 below) and the way s/he is supposed to say the lines (see Example 2 below):

Example 1: *Ratso laughs with Joe, almost spilling the soup.
Joe reaches to steady it.*

Example 2: *(Ratso speaks hesitantly).*

As I see it, a theatre translator can be seen translating the actor's lines as scores if s/he approaches them from the outside, giving the actor only what is absolutely relevant and necessary to play the role. It is left for the actor, then, to give life to the character and give them their thoughts, emotions and feelings.

The Stanislavski method: Emotional recall

The Stanislavski Method of Acting uses the technique of *Emotional Memory*. The technique requires that the actor recalls a real experience in which s/he has felt a similar emotion to the one demanded by the role s/he is playing. S/he then "borrows" those feelings to bring the role to life. (Emotional memory - Naturalism and Stanislavski): The following excerpt illustrates well the application of *the Stanislavskian Method* to theatre translation. The translator describes her working process when she was translating into Finnish the role of Blanche in *The Streetcar Named Desire*:

Also, Blanche is suffering but my pain is likely to be severe. I'm madly in love, just like Blanche, who is fluttering from one feeling to another like a thin butterfly in the wind. Also, my soul is fluttering. Besides, Blanche stirs up strange emotions in me, vague memories from the time when I was still dependent on my surroundings and its ability to look after me.

[...]

I am wasting away, because I am sure that us, me, my mother, and Blanche will share the same fate as human beings and as women. We will spoil our chances and remain lonely forever (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 29).

Here the translator has become the character she is creating, feeling the same emotions and the same pain. She identifies strongly with the emotional state of Blanche. The following translator has established himself as one of the best Finnish translators of classics and Shakespeare's work in particular. In his work, he seems to follow *the Stanislavski Method* as well, but unlike the first citation, here the translator talks about the creation of all the characters. He also mentions acting in the scenes but clearly wants to be drawn to the emotional world of the characters: "Before I start shaping the text into Finnish, I go inside the play and won't come out till I have been every character in the play, acted in every scene, died and arisen from the dead, and internalized every single line" (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 79).

A clear reference to *Emotional Memory* and *Recall* is also expressed by the next translator:

A playscript is a mass of words and analogies to emotions, which have been familiar to us from the old throughout our lives. Our mind organises these words like a kaleidoscope again and again. A new emotion is born, whenever you find the truth (A Finnish translator in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 33-34).

Emotional memory is like a cellar which we can visit occasionally:

We all have our subconsciousness, our cellar whose door we'd like to keep locked. With every play I have translated, I had to open that door a little. I have lived through the characters and at the same time brought up things about

myself from the cellar [...] (A Hungarian translator in Aaltonen, 2010, p. 117).

In the repertoire of *Stanislavskian Method*, the translators described their involvement in the internal world of the characters and the way of constructing them with *Emotional Recall*. They become involved in the thoughts and feelings of their characters both psychologically and somatically, which helped to create stage speech. Metaphorically we could say that when the character leaves, only a naked actor remains. Translators who followed *the Stanislavski Method* were creating naturalistic characters, which, of course had already been the genre of the source text. When the translator approaches the characters and their lines with *the Brechtian Verfremdung*, the genre of the play is not decisive. The translator can choose distancing even when s/he is translating a naturalistic play.

The Brechtian method: Verfremdung or distancing

The opposite method to *the Stanislavski Method* of translating for the stage is to translate the lines as raw material for the actors to work on, do only the groundwork and let the actors take over after the translation is completed. This appeared to be the way that most dramaturgs felt the translation process should be like: "The translator mustn't put in the text what the actor can express non-verbally. The actor will find the expression for an emotion and purpose irrespective of the words" (A Finnish dramaturg in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 40-41).

Some translators had adopted this working method as the following examples illustrate:

A translated play is an independent artistic accomplishment. It is the foundation – or the false floor – that, in fact, gives the starting point to the entire ensemble – a foundation to the performance (A Finnish translator/playwright in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 97).

The texture of the play is material for the director, the actor, and all the rest of the artistic staff and the technicians [...], and to speak to all these individuals, both the playwright and translator must have knowledge of these special fields [...] and act in his/her mind everyone's job [...] (A Finnish translator/playwright in Aaltonen, 1998, p. 95).

In the latter example, the translator explains that, as he is basically preparing raw material for the entire ensemble, he must act their roles (to find out what they are expecting from the script).

The translators in the above examples concentrate on the actors' work rather than getting emotionally involved in the characters they are creating. They followed the distancing method and saw as their task to create theatrical scores that the actors, under the director's guidance, could turn into characters on stage. The translations were like verbally constructed building blocks with which the actors were expected to continue the work of the translator to the finished building, the performance which the audience would then see.

Final remarks

The aim of the present study was to analyse theatre translation from the translators' point of view in a peripheral theatrical system where translations have always been, and still are, essential for the survival of the system. The data consisted of 27 self-reflections by theatre translators who had been asked to describe their work. The material for the study was drawn from two collections of articles where theatre practitioners described translation for the stage of both foreign plays in Finland and Finnish plays in several countries in Europe and Asia. The method was Critical Discourse Analysis, which provided the tools for analysing the translators discourse of their work. The first question set in the analysis concerned the translators' physical presence in the process of preparing a scenic text for the stage, and the second question was set to explore the

working method the translators applied in creating characters in the play. In a small language area such as Finland, translators are constantly pressed for time if they want to make a living solely from theatre translation. Would it be feasible to expect that they would allow themselves to be emotionally involved in the lives of the characters, or would they have to confine their work to translating the scores, that is the character speech as raw material for the actors to take over?

The findings indicated that, although translators are essential for the existence of Finnish theatre, they are still regarded as outsiders, whose task is to deliver raw material to the rest of the ensemble. Exclusion from the rehearsal room or the feeling of liminality were the most common repertoires in constructing the discourse of the translators' physical presence in the rehearsal room. Only very few were welcomed to take part in the production process after they had submitted the manuscript.

Although theatre translators would need to translate some ten plays a year to make a living from that, there were still some who opted for *the Stanislavski Method* of recalling their own *Emotional Memory* in constructing the characters in the play. Mostly the translators aimed to understand the playwright's intended meanings or prepared raw material for the director, dramaturg, actors, and the technical staff to continue the work towards a performance.

The findings to the first question were surprising, considering that so much of theatre repertoires in Finland are made up of translated plays. It is unthinkable that Finnish theatre could survive without them. The findings to the second question were as expected, but, still, it was surprising to find that there were translators who let themselves be drawn into the lives of the characters, which might, at worst, be emotionally draining.

As the data in the analysis was relatively small, the findings must be regarded as indicative of possible trends. The analysis could be, however, expanded by studying similar questions in other peripheral systems, or including several other variables, such as the demographics of the translators, the types of theatres, directors and

plays in the study of the discourse of the physical presence in the rehearsal room. Still another aspect could be to compare translator demographics as well as their work experience or status to their working method. Questions such as “does the status of the translator affect their inclusion in the rehearsal process?”, or “how much time could the translators sit in the rehearsals, which might take up to two months?”, and, finally, when already working on a new translation, would the translators like to be consulted about the changes (any particular changes?) in the scripts they have already left behind?

References

Aaltonen, Sirkku (Org.). *Käännetyt illuusiot*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 1998.

Aaltonen, Sirkku. “How to Find Audiences for Untapped Reservoirs of Contemporary Drama from Small Cultures”. In: Brilhante, Maria João & Carvalho, Manuela (Org.). *Space and Place in Theatrical Contact Zones - ACT 15*. Teatro e Tradução: Palcos de Encontro. Porto: Campo das Letras, 2007. p. 53-54.

Aaltonen, Sirkku (Org.). *Matkalippu maailmalle*. Helsinki: Like, 2010.

Aaltonen, Sirkku. *Code-choice and Identity Construction on Stage*. New York: Routledge, 2020.

Aaltonen, Sirkku & Marja Jänis. “Näytelmäkäännökset suomalaisen teatterin lähteenä”. In: Riikonen, Hannu *et al.* (Orgs.). *Suomennoskirjallisuuden historia*. Helsinki: SKS, 2007. p. 264-277.

"Brecht's 'Epic Theatre' and 'Verfremdungseffekt' techniques". *Actorhub*. Available at <https://www.actorhub.co.uk/259/brechts-epic-theatre-and-verfremdungseffekt-techniques>. Accessed on 7 Sept. 2022.

"Epic theatre and political theatre". *BBC Bitesize*. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zmn9382/revision/3>. Accessed on 12 Dec. 2022.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Johnston, David (Org.). *Stages of Translation*. London: Absolute Press, 1996.

Kirsch, Adam. "Fernando Pessoa's (1888 – 1935) Disappearing Act - The mysterious masterpiece of Portugal's great modernist". *The New Yorker*. 04/09/2017. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/09/04/fernando-pessoas-disappearing-act>. Accessed on Dec 12, 2022.

Mills, Sara. *Discourse*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2004.

"Stanislavski's System for Actors". Uhs10drama. Powerpoint presentation. 2017. Available at: <https://uhs10drama.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/the-stanislavski-system-for-actors.pdf>. Accessed on Sept. 07, 2022.

Stara, Linnea & Volmari, Pia (Orgs.) *Finnish Performing Arts Statistics 2021*. Helsinki: Tinfo, 2021. Available at: https://www.tinfo.fi/documents/ett_2021_web.pdf. Accessed on Dec. 27, 2022.

Toury, Gideon. *Descriptive Translation Studies - and beyond*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012.

Van Dijk, Teun. *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk*. London: Sage Publications, Inc., 1987.

Wetherell, Margaret & Potter, Jonatham. "Discourse Analysis and the Identification of Interpretive Repertoires." In: Antaki, Charles (Ed.). *Analysing Everyday Explanation. A Casebook of Methods*. London: Sage, 1988. p. 168-183.

Wodak, Ruth & Krzyzanowski, Michal (Org.). *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*. London: Macmillan Education, 2008.

Recebido em: 17/10/2022

Aprovado em: 19/11/2022

Publicado em março de 2023

Sirkku Aaltonen.Vaasa, Finland. E-mail: sirkku.aaltonen@uwasa.fi. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9583-3245>.