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Culture-specific items in Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder by Jo Nesbø

Bachelor's project in Lektorutdanning i språkfag

Supervisor: Anja Katrine Angelsen

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Introduction

In recent years, Scandinavian crime fiction has seen a rise in popularity in the UK and worldwide, often under the name ‘Nordic Noir’ (Bergman, 2014, p. 81). Authors such as Jo Nesbø has captivated international audiences with blood-filled and gut-wrenching thrillers, and numerous scholars have taken to the duty of studying the phenomenon (Bergman, 2014; Peacock, 2014; Stougaard-Nielsen, 2016). It is a bit unexpected, then, that an author with such a dark imagination has written a series of novels for children. Jo Nesbø’s novel *Doctor Proctor’s Fart Powder* (2014) is about Nilly, Lisa and the rather eccentric Doctor Proctor, who has invented a fart powder. The novel details their adventures with said powder. This novel has been translated into English, which is a bit unusual. Lawrence Venuti states that the number of books translated from English vastly outnumbers the number translated to English (2008, p. 11). This would imply that getting a novel, not to mention a children’s novel, translated into English would be quite the feat.

Many scholars have written about the translation of children’s literature (Alvstad, 2010; Oittinen, 2000; Shavit, 1981; Puurtinen, 1994). It is implied that translations of children’s literature tend to be target-culture oriented, as it is believed that children have difficulty understanding foreign references (Puurtinen, 1994, p. 84). However, none of these scholars have studied translations into English. What happens when one translates into English? Lawrence Venuti states that literature translated from a foreign language to English tends to be domesticating due to the English language’s position as a dominant language (Venuti, 2008, p. 13). Although Venuti refers to literature for adults, it would be interesting to see if the same applies to literature for children. Thus, my research question is: *What translational strategy, in terms of foreignization and domestication, is applied on culture-specific items in Doctor Proctor’s Fart Powder?*

This paper consists of four main sections. In the first section I will introduce a selection of theories on the subject. In the second section I outline the methodology with which I will be framing the paper, which is Gideon Toury’s (2012) three-phase methodology for descriptive translation studies. In the third section, I present my data and analyse them, and the final section is a discussion of the findings.

1. Theory

Domestication and foreignization

In my analysis of the degree of domestication and foreignization in the translation of *Doctor Proctor’s Fart Powder*, I will use the concepts as Lawrence Venuti does. He argues that

foreignization is a way of staying closer to the source culture, and that foreignizing translation emphasises the differences between the cultures by using the cultural framework of the source culture in the target language (Venuti, 2008, p. 15). An interesting note here, is Venuti's argument that translation is violent. He claims that domesticating translation entails erasing cultural and linguistic signifiers from the source text to the target text, and he therefore promotes foreignization as it does not replace as many of the foreign signifiers (p. 15).

Polysystem theory

Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory entails thinking of literature as taking place in a polysystem, which is a system where multiple parts of it are interconnected and influencing each other (Even-Zohar, 1979, p. 291). Even-Zohar states that at the centre of the literary system, one finds literature that at the time is canonized (1979, p. 296). However, as there are multiple parts of the system, other parts might eventually take the canonical place in the centre (1979, p. 296). The system is in other words not static, as it is liable to change. Even-Zohar argues that translated literature is also part of this polysystem and the position determines the amount of freedom a translator has to manipulate a text (1990, p. 47).

Culture-specific items

Analysing the complete *Doctor Proctor* novel would go beyond the scope of this paper. I therefore decided to look at culture-specific items – henceforth referred to as CSI – as they might have posed a challenge for the translator. This prompted the issue of defining what a CSI is. Javier Franco Aixelá defines CSI as:

Those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text (Aixelá, 1996, p. 58).

In other words, a CSI is an element in a text that can be difficult to translate, either because the target language does not have a word for it, or because it has a specific connotation or function that might get lost in the translation. Aixelá distinguishes between two basic types of CSI: proper nouns and common expressions. Common expressions are those 'objects, institutions, habits and opinions restricted to each culture' that are inappropriate to include among the proper nouns (Aixelá, 1996, p. 59). For the purpose of this paper, only common expressions are of interest.

Strategy and procedure

Within the field of translation studies, one might encounter the terms ‘strategy’ and ‘procedure’, often in relation to the works of Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet. They outline different translation procedures grouped within two main methods of translation: direct and oblique translation (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 31). In their work, a ‘procedure’ seems to be a method of translation of specific items or parts of a text. ‘Strategy’ is not mentioned, but Venuti (2008) appears to use the term to imply an overall approach to translating a text.

Similarly, Javier Franco Aixelá seeks to outline different methods that can be applied to CSI in translation. He ranks them according to their degree of orientation towards source or target culture. The strategies are then divided into two main groups: conservation and substitution. Conservation is source-culture oriented and substitution is target-culture oriented (Aixelá, 1996, pp. 60-61). Based on this, one could argue that conservation to a degree relates to Venuti’s foreignizing strategy and substitution to his domesticating strategy. The conservation group contains repetition, orthographic variation, linguistic (non-cultural) translation, extratextual gloss and intratextual gloss (pp. 61-62). The substitution group contains synonymy, limited universalisation, absolute universalisation, naturalisation, deletion and autonomous creation (pp. 63-64). Aixelá does not make a distinction between ‘procedure’ and ‘strategy’ and appears to use both terms about methods applied to CSI. In this paper I will therefore use ‘strategy’ to describe the treatment of each CSI, and ‘procedure’ to describe Aixelá’s methods. Aixelá’s methods will thus be used to help establish the strategies.

Translation of children’s literature

Riitta Oittinen addresses the difficulty of determining what children’s literature is. She argues that children’s literature is termed so by many scholars because of its intended audience, in other words that it is written for children (Oittinen 2000, p. 49). Oittinen points to a complicating aspect, as large parts of what is considered children’s literature has a dual intended audience – children and their parents (p. 49). She implies that there are different levels within the same text, one which is fairly straightforward and aimed at the children, while the other is more complex and intended to appeal to the parents. Literature written for children is therefore also written for the adults, as they are the ones who decide which books to read (p. 49). Regarding translation of children’s literature, Oittinen is positive towards making changes on a text to suit the target audience, and she argues that texts should in fact

address children of the target culture (p. 111). Oittinen appears as such to favour domestication.

Zohar Shavit bases herself on Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and argues that the position of children's literature determines how a translator might choose to translate a novel for children (Shavit, 1981, p. 171). She claims that children's literature holds a peripheral position in the literary polysystem, thus allowing the translator room for creativity with the text and to manipulate it, as long as the text adheres to the two overarching principles for children's literature which involves making the text appropriate for children in terms of what society values, and to adjust the text to children's comprehension level (pp.171-172). Shavit argues that principles in translation of children's literature is governed by principles in translation of adult literature, oftentimes even to a greater degree, due to the position of children's literature in the polysystem (pp. 172-173). She does not, however, agree with such target-culture orientation, the reason being that in the attempt to adapt a text to its target audience, much is lost from the source text.

Like Shavit, Tiina Puurtinen points to the principles governing children's literature regarding norms and values and comprehension (Puurtinen, 1994, p. 83). Puurtinen states that these principles tend to promote a more domesticating translation, as the translators aim towards minimising the occurrence of foreign elements in order to achieve maximum comprehension and acceptability in the target audience: '... children with their imperfect reading abilities and limited experience of life are not expected to tolerate as much strangeness and foreignness as adult readers' (Puurtinen, 1994, p. 84). It does, then, seem as though both Shavit and Puurtinen feel that children's literature is to a large degree target-culture oriented and therefore domesticating.

Among more recent theorists, one finds Cecilia Alvstad (2010). Alvstad argues that the translation of children's literature is characterized by five main traits, which includes cultural context adaptation and dual readership (Alvstad, 2010, p. 22). Alvstad therefore appears to be in line with the other scholars as her cultural context adaptation and ideological manipulation can be a reference to the governing principles Shavit and Puurtinen talks about, and the dual readership is found in both Puurtinen and Oittinen's texts. One could therefore assume that there is an agreement that these concepts exist, even though scholars might disagree with the use of them.

2. Method

The framework for the analysis is Gideon Toury's (2012) three-phase methodology for descriptive translation studies. Descriptive translation studies aim to study and describe already existing translations and attempt to explain them (Toury 2012, p. 9). Toury's three-phase methodology consists of three phases. The first phase is target-oriented and involves looking at the target text as a translation of its own, in addition to placing the target text within the target culture (p. 31). The second phase includes the source text, and entails studying the target text in relation to the source text, using either the whole texts or parts of them (p. 33). In this phase, one should find corresponding elements from the source text and the target text to compare (p. 32). The final phase is to formulate generalizations about the findings in the previous steps (p. 33). The scope of this paper and the number of pairs in my selection indicates that while I can attempt to generalize, I do not have sufficient data to state confidently that my findings are true for the novel as a whole, nor that they are transferrable or relevant to other children's novels translated into English.

Considering that the novel is set in Norway in the weeks leading up to the seventeenth of May, I decided to look at CSI that might have posed difficulties for the translator as the references are thoroughly linked to Norwegian culture. I based myself on Aixelá's definition of CSI to narrow my focus, but I needed to limit my selection even further. I created two categories; 'food items' and a 'mixed category'. Together, they consist of 12 CSI. The novel contains many references to food, and I have selected only those elements that have very clear cultural connotations such as traditional food and food consumed on the seventeenth of May. The second category is a 'mixed category', where I have included various elements relating specifically to the celebration of the seventeenth of May. I will now begin phase one of the methodology.

3. Data and analysis

The story takes place in the weeks leading up to the celebration of Norway's national day. One might assume that the setting is foreign for the British children who are the intended audience of this translation. I am studying the British English edition of the novel, but there is also an American edition intended for an American audience, and they are both translated by the same person (Simon & Schuster, n.d.). It could seem like both the US edition and the UK edition is translated with an American audience in mind. I will get back to this point a bit later, but considering that I haven't studied the US edition, I cannot say for certain that this is the case.

When attempting to place the translated text in the target culture, it is relevant to look at the author of the novel – Jo Nesbø. Due to his position as an internationally acclaimed crime writer, it is not unreasonable to assume that many British book readers know his name, in particular in relation to the ‘Nordic noir’ phenomenon. Although the setting of *Doctor Proctor’s Fart Powder* is assumed foreign to British children, it is a possibility that their parents are somewhat familiar with the setting through the novels of Nesbø and other Scandinavian authors.

Table 1

	Source text [gloss]	Target text	Strategy
<i>Food items</i>	1 Kroneis (p.6) [crown ice]	Ice-cream cones (p. 4)	Domesticating
	2 Fiskeboller (p. 59) [fish buns]	Fish balls (p. 73)	Foreignizing
	3 Karamellpudding (p. 67 etc.) [caramel pudding]	Jelly bathed in caramel sauce (p.83 etc.)	Foreignizing
	4 Eggedosisoppskrifter (p. 139) [eggnog recipe]	Traditional eggnog recipes (p. 179)	Domesticating
	5 Pølse og is (p. 188) [sausage and ice]	Hot dogs and ice cream (p. 240)	Foreignizing
	6 Wienerpølse i lompe (p. 198) [Vienna sausage in potato cake]	Hot dog in a bun (p. 253)	Domesticating
<i>Mixed category</i>	7 Syttende mai (p. 6) [seventeenth May]	The seventeenth of May, Norwegian Independence Day (p. 2)	Foreignizing
	8 17.mai-toget (p. 34) [seventeenth May parade]	Norwegian Independence Day parade on the seventeenth of May (p. 41)	Foreignizing
	9 Nasjonalsanger (p.139) [national songs]	The national anthem (p. 179)	Domesticating
	10 Eggeløpet (p. 185) [the egg race]	The (...) Egg-Rolling Race (p. 234)	Domesticating

11	Sekkeløp (p. 185) [sack race]	Sack races (p. 234)	Foreignizing
12	Bunadsforklær (p. 139) [bunad aprons]	The aprons that went with their national costumes (p. 179)	Foreignizing

I now move on to phase two. Table 1, above, contains my selection of coupled pairs in addition to the strategy I believe they belong to. The first column shows the category and corresponding number of the pairs. The second column contains the source text element and a gloss, while the third column contains the translation. In the final column I have listed the translational strategy. Henceforth, I will refer to each pair primarily by their corresponding number.

The ‘food items’ category consists of pairs 1 through 6. Number 1 showcases the shift from a very specific kind of ice-cream in Norway, into the more neutral ‘ice-cream cone’. This is what Aixelá might call an absolute universalisation, which means that a specific reference is replaced with a far more neutral reference to remove any foreign references (1996, p. 63), This points to a domesticating strategy. In number 2, the translator kept the original reference as close to the translation as possible, only changing ‘buns’ to ‘balls’. It does not fit neatly into any of Aixelá’s procedures, but I would argue that this is a foreignizing strategy as it preserves the foreign reference. Number 3, a CSI with strong connotations in Norway, is made more explicit in the target text, and may be a kind of intratextual gloss. This entails preserving the reference but adding an explanatory segment as part of the text (p. 62). Number 4 consists of a strong reference to the national day. There are no words that translates directly, so it may seem as though the translator has chosen absolute universalization, and this leads to a loss in meaning. The original reference in number 5 and 6 both contain very specific associations to the seventeenth of May. Number 5 is translated without much adaptation, but it involves a loss in meaning as the food items are closely associated with the seventeenth of May. No category of Aixelá fits perfectly with this pair, but I would argue that this is a foreignizing strategy. Number 6 can be deemed absolute universalisation as the CSI becomes a very neutral reference. Although the end result in these two pairs are very similar, their treatment differs, and they might be said to belong to different strategies.

The 'mixed category' consists of pairs 7 through 12. Number 7 and 8 belongs in Aixelá's intratextual gloss due to the added information about the date. Number 9 is particularized as it changes from a mention of some songs relating to the seventeenth of May to a specific national anthem. This causes a loss in meaning, but also makes it easier for the target audience to understand, thus I would argue it is domesticating. Number 10 and 11 both refer to activities very closely linked to the seventeenth of May. The treatment of the two pairs are, however, different. Number 10 is domesticating as it substitutes the CSI with a CSI belonging to the target culture. Number 11 is foreignizing as it leaves the reference unchanged. This causes a loss in meaning as the Norwegian connotation is explicitly connected to the national day celebration. Number 12 is an intratextual gloss and it is therefore part of a foreignizing strategy. With the analysis in mind, I will move on to phase three.

4. Discussion

It was interesting to note the differences in number 5 and 6, as they on surface level seem similar. I have listed number 5 as part of a foreignizing strategy, but one might argue that it is a domesticating strategy as it appears to be oriented towards the target audience. My argument is that the reference is translated relatively directly, without changing it. The two elements – hot dog and ice cream – are kept together and in that order. Thus, I would say it is an orientation towards the source text as the combination of hot dogs and ice to many Norwegians are strongly associated with the national day celebration. Number 6, on the other hand, is listed as domesticating because it seems to substitute a very particular reference in the source text with something more neutral to ease comprehension in the target audience. The same happens, in my opinion, in number 1. 'Kroneis' is the name of a particular type of ice-cream and gives off a specific connotation, as it is a kind of ice-cream that Norwegians tend to eat a lot of on the seventeenth of May. When the translation refers to a more generic ice-cream cone, there is a loss in meaning.

Number 2 and 3 are both instances where the CSI is translated but not necessarily adapted. Neither of the dishes are particularly common in the UK, although if the translator had opted to translate to something equivalent in terms of a similar dessert, 'flan' could have been the translation for 'karamellpudding'. In order to create a better understanding of what the dishes consist of, the translator appears to have chosen to place the unfamiliar within a familiar frame. Meat balls are familiar through both the Italian and Swedish cuisine. This way the readers get an understanding of what kind of dish this is, and the archetypal Norwegian

dessert in number 3 is translated in a way that explicitly describes it. Another particularly Norwegian dessert item, the 'eggedosis' is however not handled the same way. This may be due to the popularity of 'eggnog' on festive occasions in the US and possibly the UK too, and opting for this translation could be viewed as the best option to promote comprehension.

Some food items, therefore, appears to be translated according to the principle of comprehension in translation of children's literature, in that they are adapted to an audience that likely would not understand the source text references. Even though these translation procedures cause clear losses in terms of the connotations that lie in the Norwegian words, a strictly foreignizing strategy on all food items might cause the target audience to lose interest if all references are unfamiliar. To a certain extent, then, it could be argued that it might be necessary to keep the target audience in mind.

One could say that the celebration of the seventeenth of May is an institution in Norwegian society due to its significance and position. It is celebrated throughout the nation, with organised parades and activities and everyone dresses up in their traditional costumes or in suits and dresses. It is therefore interesting to note the translation procedure of 7 and 8. The date is kept unchanged, and the translator has opted for explicitation as information about what the day represents to Norwegian is added. As mentioned earlier, I am studying the British edition of the novel. The translator's decision to call the celebration Norway's Independence Day is quite interesting, due to the term having American connotations in my opinion, and the relative lack of equivalent celebrations in the UK. It is possible that this is translated in American terms because the translator is American. This could also, however, imply that the translator saw this as the best method of showing British children, too, what the day symbolises. In addition to the American connotations, it is also necessary to point out that the day is not a celebration of Norway's independence, rather it is a celebration of the Norwegian constitution, and would often be termed Norway's national day (Scott, Tvedt & Mardal, 2018).

The other CSI in the mixed category are generally more foreignizing than domesticating. I do find it interesting, however, to look at number 10, as the original reference is translated to something else that is also involving eggs and which is also an annual tradition. In the US, egg-rolling has a long tradition, involving rolling hard-boiled eggs outside the White House during Easter (The White House, n.d.). In Norway, 'eggeløp' is typically associated with the seventeenth of May and involves an egg and a spoon. The translator might have chosen this particular translation because it is also annual and

significant to an American audience, but it is possible the significance is lost on the British audience also in the translated form.

My selection, albeit limited, shows that the novel seems to be slightly more foreignizing than domesticating, but the food items are to a larger degree part of the domesticating strategy than the mixed category is. Expanding the selection, or studying the novel as a whole, one might get other results, but this selection suggests a stronger foreignizing strategy. Turning to Zohar Shavit and the polysystem theory, one would expect a more domesticating strategy, due to the position children's literature and particularly translated children's literature holds in the polysystem (1981, pp. 171-172). However, Scandinavian literature is on the rise, and although it is translated literature, it is read by thousands of people and has paved the way for a new kind of criminal literature known as 'Nordic noir' (Stougaard-Nielsen, 2016). 'Nordic Noir' and Jo Nesbø might therefore be considered to hold a more central position in the polysystem, which might in turn influence the position of his children's novels.

The prevailing attitude that children should not be exposed to too much foreign references or strangeness (Puurtinen, 1994; Oittinen, 2000) seems to have been somewhat opposed in this translation. The novels physical and temporal setting is preserved without adjustments, even though British children might not be familiar with the country of Norway or its celebrations. The pertinent question is therefore whether children would understand anything despite the 'strangeness' dominating the text.

If the translator had sought to domesticate completely, thinking that children would not understand the source reference, 17th May might have been translated to the 4th of July. This way, the target audience – the American one, and possibly also the British audience – could easily relate to and understand the significance of the celebration, but it would simultaneously force the translator to change the entire setting of the novel. Thus, every other CSI would have to be treated the same way. Referring to Norway's constitutional day as its Independence Day may as such have been the most equivalent option even though it is not technically the exact same. The celebration of the US Independence Day is often associated with people gathering to celebrate and usually involves an element of pyrotechnics. Compared with the royal salutes that take place several places in Norway on the seventeenth of May and people gathering in the streets to celebrate could mirror the audience's associations to what the US Independence Day celebration entails and thus make it easier to comprehend.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have studied the translation strategies in Jo Nesbø's novel for children – *Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder*. I set out to study the CSI in the novel, and what strategy the translator has applied to them in terms of domestication and foreignization. Using Toury's three-phase methodology, I found that the translator has opted for more foreignization considering that many of the CSI have been kept as similar to the source reference as possible. There are some instances of domestication as well, but they seem primarily to be domesticating due to a lack of appropriate target-culture references. The overall strategy seems to lean towards foreignization. Starting off, I expected to see more domestication, as the theoretical texts seemed to suggest as much, so I was surprised by the amount of foreignization in a text that is so inherently lodged in the Norwegian identity through its temporal setting.

I briefly used the polysystem theory to attempt to explain this as the changing position of Scandinavian literature in the UK might indicate a slow change towards more translated literature in the British literary market. This could make the starting point for further study into the area of children's literature into English. Are other Scandinavian children's novels translated into English treated the same way? And if they are, is this just applicable to Scandinavian novels, or is this applicable to novels originally written outside these countries as well?

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