

A Study of Art Dialectic in “Literary Translations” Based on the Theories of Theodore Adorno and Walter Benjamin: A Criticism of “*The Catcher in the Rye*” Translations

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Although *The Catcher in the Rye* has already been translated into Persian by four translators including Ahmad Karimi Hakak (1966), Mohammad Najafi (1998), Zahra Zolghadr (2010), and Araz Barseghian (2014), who have taken different approaches to the art dialectic set forth by Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno. According to Benjamin (1923), a good literary translation goes beyond simple transfer of the message. The contradiction between the tone of narration and character has made its translation difficult as a puzzling artistic work. The translators have a complicated job to preserve the multiaspectuality of the main character, his internal sensations and the contradiction between his age and his consciousness in narration. Theoritians believe in the importance of keeping the contradiction between form and meaning as a potential artistic force to affect and upgrade Target Language culture, while saving the independence of its art dialectic. Theodore Adorno’s theory of Negative Dialectic (1966) and Walter Benjamin’s Reproductive Art Machine (1936) were applied to excavate and survey different strategies in literary translations of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

2. Methodology

This essay applied two comparative approaches to literary translation. First, Benjamin’s (1936) and Adorno’s (1966) theories on art dialectic were compared with each other; secondly, different ideologies of three Farsi translators of *The Catcher in the Rye* were compared with each other. The researcher respectively analyzed and described different viewpoints of the two thinkers in order to find out some scales in preserving the artistic dialectic of a literary work through the process of translation. The researcher focused on three aspects of the three translations: tone, structure and translators’ interpretations.

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3. Discussion

Different Persian translations of Salinger's masterpiece were respectively analyzed according to Walter Benjamin's Reproductive Art Machine and Theodore Adorno's Negative Dialectic. Benjamin (1923) suggested interlinear interpretations in order to reproduce meaning and save the Source Language sense, while Adorno (2002) looked for the interpretation of meaning in artistic works through an objective way. In other words, Benjamin (1923) wanted to raise the readers' consciousness by emphasizing the dynamic meaning of the text, but Adorno (1982) represents the critical aspect of an artistic text by emphasizing its independency from people's mind. The analysis of narrative tone, structural cohesion, and various interpretations of the Persian translators are accompanied with some examples.

Moreover, the ideology of *The Catcher in the Rye* was compared to the translators' ideology about the social function of art. In fact, Holden's negative attitude toward the school of rich families and their positivist educational system has implication to Adorno's negative dialectic (1966) which criticizes the capitalist domain on cultural issues, specifically in 1950s. In this way, Najafi (1998) is successful to depict the protagonist's critical approach to capitalist signs of prosperity such as: Cadillac, alcoholic drinks and opposite sex, while Barseghian (1984) uses the word "learning" for capitalist values which unexpectedly has a positive attitude and does not reveal Holden's anti-capitalism. So, Najafi's translation applies a delicate wording and tone which provides a more comprehensible picture of Salinger's artistic characterization of Holden as an obstinate teenager with the dynamic shift to a catcher or a guard for children in a chaotic society.

In this way, Hakak (1966), as the first Persian translator, applied a less informal language for Holden's discordant character. Najafi (1998) was yet more successful in revealing the dialectic aspect of Holden's character using an insulting language for the teenager. In fact, Hakak (1966) had a specific concern for people's cultural sensitivities in the Iranian traditional society as he avoided taboos (Azardashti, 2013). Hakak (1966) puts emphasis on using a mostly literal format of translation which implied his structural accordance with social norms of Iran in the 1970s. Najafi (1998) also preserved the SL structure, but he paid more attention to the rebellious tone of the protagonist. He had a remarkable approach to save the dialectic of the novel regarding its anti-capitalist tendencies. Barseghian (2014) applied more fluent sentences than Hakak (1966), but he was more conservative in the translation of taboos which could cause censorship. Altogether, the styles of the three translators are different from each other because they have done

their translations in different socio-political eras, and they have different viewpoints in making a comparison between Iranian and American societies. Hakak (1966) was not successful in keeping the protesting tone of Holden, as he finally depicted a depressed boy at the end of his translation, while Najafi's (1998) Holden had an active protesting voice (Rostami, 2013).

4. Conclusion

Iranian translators should pay great attention to the preservation of the art dialectic in their literary translations. Tone of narration, structural cohesion, and interpretations of the translators such as footnotes can be used to arrange form and content. In other words, translators should use various linguistic tools to reveal the contradictions between reality and imagination in a literary work. According to Benjamin (1923), a literary work should generate meaning in other cultures, while according to Adorno (2002), art and literary works are independent from the logic of industrialization.

Keywords: Adorno, Barseghian, Benjamin, Karimi, literary translation, Najafi, The Catcher in the Rye

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