

Translation as Manipulation: Causes and Consequences, Opinions and Attitudes

Aiga Kramina

Abstract. The present article focuses on the concept of manipulation in translation, attitudes towards it, as well as its causes and consequences. As opposed to the claims of the Manipulation School scholars the starting point for the present discussion is not an assumption that translation is or implies a certain degree of manipulation, it rather offers a number of arguments for and against this claim. The aim of the present article is to establish whether translation is manipulation, to reflect the attitudes and opinions of scholars on the issue of 'translation as manipulation', as well as to look into the possible ways of perceiving this phenomenon.

Manipulation is one of the most controversial and blurred phenomena in Translation Studies. Although it has been at the centre of attention of a number of scholars since at least the 1970s, to the author's knowledge, no comprehensive and unequivocal definition, description or conceptualisation of it has been offered as yet. It might turn out to be an impossible task, considering the multifaceted and to a certain extent evasive nature of this phenomenon.

In the course of the article certain aspects of the evasive nature of manipulation are revealed, seeking answers to two questions, first, whether translation is manipulation, and, second, why it is so difficult to conceptualise this phenomenon.

Introduction

Manipulation might be perceived as the manifestation of manipulative strategies resorted to both in everyday situations and translation to hide one's true intentions, both good and evil. For the purposes of this paper it will be assumed that there are two types of manipulation – conscious and unconscious. Manipulation arising due to ideological, economic, and cultural considerations proceeds consciously¹, and thus might be termed conscious manipulation. Manipulation ascribed to the features of human psychology and manipulation due to ignorance (lack of language or world knowledge) might be termed unconscious manipulation. The topic of translation as manipulation and attitudes towards it is very wide, and since the scope of the present article does not permit an all-embracing treatment of the issues under discussion, only some aspects of the problem and a limited number of opinions will be discussed here.

Opinions on Translation as Manipulation

It seems that in translation there is no strict definition of manipulation, and there are various understandings of this phenomenon. Various scholars have attempted to describe it, discussing both its positive and negative aspects. What some consider to be manipulation others do not. Thus, for example, Crisafulli, having analysed H. F. Cary's rendering of the Divine Comedy, questions the epistemological assumption of the Manipulation School that all translation is inherently manipulative. He explains that in this translation manipulation

or any other similar concept did not seem to account for the translator's choices (2003:1).

The claim that translation is manipulation can also be questioned if one adopts the post-structuralist stance, namely that it is possible to have multiple readings of one and the same text. Thus a question arises – who is in the position to claim that s / he has understood the text "correctly", and that a translator has got it wrong. And why would a translator misunderstand and distort the text, which is so clear to a scholar?

However, if seen, for example, from the perspective of the target culture norms any translation might be considered manipulation, if only purely technically, because the translator has to technically manipulate "with" or "around" them. The translator, striving to produce a text acceptable for the target community, has to manipulate between the various constraints under the influence of the political and literary power structures in a given society. According to Lefevere there are two general constraints that translators have to deal with when translating – the translator's own (conscious or unconscious) ideology and "the poetics" dominant in the target culture, i.e. the combination of "literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols" (Lefevere, 1992:26) and "the concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole" (ibid).

It can also be claimed that translation is manipulation because no translation can ever be the same as the original. Rabassa (1984) speaks about the impossibility of translation, if one expects that there might be a perfect equivalence between the source and the target texts, because even phonemes, not to mention words, used to denote certain phenomena or concepts, differ in various languages. Even if the corresponding words in the two languages were found, the connotations these words carry would be different. This

¹ Culture-induced manipulation is only partly avoidable, since there are cases when it is unavoidable, e.g. when dealing with dialects or cultural realia.

is especially true of culture specific items, such as cultural realia and dialects.

It seems that the view adopted on translation as manipulation depends on the way one perceives translation as such. Still, the arguments for translation as manipulation seem to be stronger. Certainly, it cannot be claimed that everything a translator does to translation is manipulation, but certain strategies under certain constraints and due to various factors result in manipulation.

Reasons for Manipulation

If one assumes that translation is manipulation, then it is necessary to clarify what are the reasons for manipulation. Lefevere believes that translation, being “the most obvious recognizable type of rewriting” (1992:9), can never free itself from the political and literary power structures existent within a given culture. More often than not, if translators want their work to be published and well-received at the target pole, they cannot disregard those constraints.

Farahzad distinguishes two types of manipulation – conscious and unconscious, and accordingly describes two types of processes, which lead to manipulation of texts in translation.

“The conscious process leads to conscious manipulation intentionally carried out by the translator because of various social, political and other factors. The unconscious manipulation is mostly a psychological phenomenon, and occurs under the influence of psychological factors” (1999:156).

The reasons why manipulation, and especially unconscious manipulation occurs may also be explained by reference to Toury’s (1995) translation laws. Thus the law of growing standardisation states that “in translation, textual relations obtaining in the original are often modified, sometimes to the point of being totally ignored, in favour of [more] habitual options offered by a target repertoire” (Toury, 1995:268). Toury explains that the translator’s behaviour is influenced by a multitude of variables “such as biological and bilingual age, or previous experience in translation of different kinds and for different purposes” (1995:270). Another influential factor, according to Toury, is the position of translation within a particular culture. Thus, “the more peripheral this status, the more translation will accommodate itself to established models and repertoires” (Toury, 1995:270-271).

The second Toury’s translation law – the law of interference, which states that “in translation, phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to be transferred to the target text.” (1995:275), also might be used to explain why manipulation occurs. Thus Toury explains, that the constant tension between the desire to produce a translation as close as possible to the original and the desire to comply with the dominant requirement for fluent, native-sounding texts often results in manipulation, or in other words positioning the translation between acceptability and adequacy:

“the more the make-up of a text is taken as a factor in the formulation of its translation, the more the target text can be

expected to show traces of interference, [...]“ (Toury, 1995:276)

To a great extent this is due to the power relations and the reciprocal prestige of the cultures and languages in question. Thus the more prestigious the source culture from the vantage point of the target culture, the higher the likelihood of interferences, and vice versa.

Another reason for manipulation certainly is financial considerations. Many works are not translated or translated only partly because of the lack of time or money for carrying out the particular task. On the other hand cultural myths or cults are created with the profit motive in mind, e.g. Harry Potter or Madonna’s children’s book series. Lefevere writes:

“Institutions enforce or, at least, try to enforce the dominant poetics of a period by using it as a yardstick against which current production is measured. Accordingly, certain works of literature will be elevated to the level of ‘classics’ within a relatively short time after publication, while others are rejected, some to reach the exalted position of a classic later, when the dominant poetics has changed” (1992:19).

Also ideological considerations play a considerable role in defining translation policy. During certain periods of history some texts were not translated at all or had to be translated according to certain requirements. One of the best examples is the translation policy adopted in the former Soviet Union. As a result many works were not translated at all, and others contained numerous omissions, and alterations.

Attitudes Towards Manipulation

If one assumes that translation is manipulation, the question arises whether it really is unavoidable and how to qualify it – as something positive or negative. The answer seems to depend on the reference angle adopted, and on one’s understanding of manipulation in translation. For example, if one believes that explicitation² is a manifestation of manipulation and that it is present in every translation, then any translation can be perceived as manipulation. Consequently it can be claimed that manipulation is unavoidable.

Katan (1999) thinks that manipulation is part and parcel of a translation. He begins the argument by quoting the Collins English Dictionary (1991) where the word to manipulate is defined as follows:

- 1) to handle or use, especially with some skill;
- 2) to negotiate, control, or influence (something or someone) cleverly, skilfully, or deviously.

He believes that “the very act of translating involves skilful manipulation” (Katan, 1999:140), and that also seemingly faithful translations can be as devious or even more devious than allegedly free translations. As an example he

² “... a phenomenon which frequently leads to TT (Target Text) stating ST (Source Text) information in a more explicit form than the original.” (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997:55)

brings the case of President Nixon who visited Japan, and was mislead exactly due to a literal translation³.

Also the consideration of the (in)visibility of translator can help clarify the issue of the unavoidability of manipulation. Holman and Boase-Beier (1999) explain that a translator will always be present in a text s / he has translated "Like the original author, the translator, too, will have hierarchies of aims and agendas, some conscious, other less so, and in different ways these will all constrain and colour the recreated SL text" (1999:9).

Gentzler explains that according to views of the Göttingen group, "the translation of literature means the translation of a literary work's interpretation, one which is subject to the literary traditions in the target culture" (1993:184). Since literary translation can only be an interpretation of the original, it can never fully replicate it and, besides, it must blend in with the literary tradition of the target culture, and as such has to be manipulative. Accordingly, in literary translation manipulation cannot be avoided. This view is also in line with the contemporary thinking on translation, namely that literary translation is and always will be permeated with various sorts of ideology, and the translator will be compelled to somehow avoid or demonstrate the clashes with the dominating target culture norms (Abdulla, 1999:12).

The next question that needs to be answered concerns the perception of manipulation. How to perceive it – as something good or something bad? It seems useful here to adopt Katan's (1999) approach. Although he refers to distortion, the idea seems worth considering. Besides, distortion could be perceived as a type of manipulation, especially in the light of Katan's own description of this phenomenon, namely that "distortion can occur through a faithful, literal translation and by making explicit what was originally implicit" (1999:138). Katan suggests that:

"distortion in itself is neither good nor bad. It is a way of directing the addressee to what the speaker or writer considers is important. Distortion does not give us an objective picture of reality, but functions like a zoom lens allowing the reader to focus on certain aspects, leaving other aspects in the background" (1999:138).

Thus, also in relation to manipulation, it might be claimed that, in general, it is neither good nor bad. It simply exists, especially in the case of unavoidable manipulation. Also if one assumes that in literary translation manipulation is always unavoidable it cannot be considered within the categories of good and bad. As regards conscious manipulation and manipulation due to ignorance it can be argued that they are bad and undesirable. Whether it can be avoided at all and how, depends on the cultural context, on the literal,

political and economic power structures as well as on the translator's professionalism and experience.

Results of Manipulation

What are, then, the results of manipulation? On the one hand it can be claimed that manipulation, or rather the awareness of translation as manipulation, has disastrous effects. If one believes that translation is manipulation, it follows that it cannot be trusted, and if so, who needs it?

"[...] when words become the tools, not of clarity and precision but of confusion and obfuscation in order to promote a particular ideology or social program or some very intimate personal or private agenda, genuine communication between opposing parties becomes impossible" (Stockert, 1996:1).

At the same time, it can also be claimed that everything is manipulation, political speeches, sermons, everyday conversations, not to mention advertisements. But it is translation that is in an unfortunate position, since it can always be compared with the original.

Bassnett and Lefevere, when speaking about the results of manipulation, claim, that manipulation "in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain" (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1992:vii). It follows that there is no unanimous answer to the question of how to perceive manipulation, because too many variables come into play.

Reactions to Manipulation

In the light of the above discussion another question needs to be answered, namely: what are the translators to do in this situation? First of all it must be pointed out that translators need to be aware of the phenomenon manipulation in all its manifestations, to be able to control it, and not to be controlled by it. Indeed, it seems that the only possible answer or suggestion in this case might be the appeal to translator ethics, professionalism and common sense.

And what are the rest of us to do under the circumstances? It is no secret that our culture becomes less and less a book culture and more and more a cinema, television and Internet culture. Only a small group of readers, which Lefevere calls "professional readers" or "the charmed circle", i.e. scholars, students, and the academic staff, actually still read extensively. Lefevere explains that "paradoxically, the only work produced within the charmed circle that still reaches the reader is precisely the type of rewriting most professional readers would tend to treat with a certain disdain." (1992:4), i.e. translations, reviews, biographies, or in other words rewritings. Thus, through rewriting the survival of literary work is ensured. So it might be suggested that translation be perceived as a necessary evil, so to speak, bearing in mind its manipulatory potential, but at the same time remembering that only due to that particular rewriting one has access to a particular work. This might also be considered one of the attractions of

³ President Nixon was in Japan to discuss trade matters and the issue of the Okinawan islands with Prime Minister Sato. In the course of negotiations Nixon conceded the islands to Japan and in return wanted Japan to provide some concessions of import quotas to the United States. The interpreter provided a literal rendition of Sato's reply "[zensho shimas]" as "I will deal with the matter in a forward-looking manner", whereas what the Japanese Prime Minister actually meant was "We would not wish to spoil your stay here, but..." (Katan, 1999:211).

translation. Barnstone, for example, compares translation to a river, which “carries us through time. When it causes earlier moments and old literatures to survive, when it floats some part of a tradition to us live and with recreated originality, then translation is art” (1993:107).

It might seem paradoxical that readers are biased towards translations already at the very outset, thus, robbing themselves of the pleasure of enjoying a literary work. However, when one is not aware, or forgets, that what one is reading is a translation, one might start enjoying the work and forget about finding faults with it. It is no secret that in the Western tradition translations have always been considered inferior to their originals. Lefevere (1998) traces the development of translation tradition back to the beginnings of Western civilisation, and explains how this attitude has come about. Barnstone, among others, argues that it would be more beneficial for readers to free themselves from those stereotypes and enjoy the work they are offered:

“To allow an obtrusive intertextuality – the fact of its translation – to subvert the reading experience is to surrender to frivolous ignorance and to obey a feudal principle of originality; it cheapens the reality of the literary object in our possession. In doing so, we substitute a dream of the unknown subtext (of what is indecipherable or inaccessible, yet acclaimed real) for the actual page before our eyes and end up unjustly deprived” (Barnstone, 1993:12-13).

He suggests that translation be perceived as a collaboration of the writer and the author, or a “double art”, and explains that “to produce a translation the normal triad of author-text-receiver is doubled. So technically, we may discover that we are reading the writing of an author who is reader-translator of another author’s writing” (Barnstone, 1993:13).

It can even be argued, as Hermans (1999) does, that translation as an object of study is so interesting in part exactly due to manipulation as a manifestation of the underlying ideology, power structures and power struggle.

Conclusion

The present article deals with the topic of translation as manipulation, seeking to explain the causes of manipulation in translation and looking into the consequences of the application of manipulative translation strategies. It seeks answers to two questions, first, whether translation is manipulation, and second, why it is so difficult to conceptualise translational manipulation. In attempts to find answers to these questions opinions and attitudes of scholars on the issue “translation as manipulation” are examined. As regards the first question, namely: whether

Aiga Kramina

Vertimas – būdas manipiliuoti: priežastys ir pasekmės, nuomonės ir požiūriai

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama manipiliavimo vertime savoka, požiūriai į jį, o taip pat jų sukeliančios priežastys bei pasėkmės. Šios diskusijos pradžioje autorė nedaro priežiūrų, kad vertimas yra manipuliacija ar tame bent dalinai naudojami manipiliavimo elementai, kaip teigia manipuliacijos mokyklos šalininkai, o pateikia keletą argumentų už ir prieš ši teiginį. Šio straipsnio tiklas – nustatyti ar vertimas iš tiesų yra manipiliavimas, atspindėti mokslininkų požiūrius ir nuomonės apie „vertimą kaip manipuliacijos būdą“, o taip pat pabandyti suvokti ši reiškinį. Manipiliavimas yra vienas iš prieštaragingiausių ir daugiausiai neaiškumų sukeliantis reiškinys vertimo studijose. Nors jis jau patraukė daugelio mokslininkų dėmesį nuo aštunto dešimtmečio pradžios autorės žiniomis, nebuvu pasiūlyta jokio aiškaus, nedviprasmiško manipuliacijos apibūdinimo ar sampratos. Gali paaiškėti, kad tai yra neįmanoma, nes šis reiškinys turi daugybę aspektų ir tam tikra prasme yra išsisukimo būdas.

translation is manipulation, it is suggested that the answer depends on the vantage point adopted and on one's understanding of manipulation and translation as phenomena. The answer to the second question, namely: why it is so difficult to conceptualise manipulation, lies in the very nature of this evasive phenomenon. It seems that first of all it is necessary to develop a clear concept of translational manipulation, secondly it is necessary to make a clear distinction between manipulation and other translation strategies. Thus, the second question poses more problems and opens new perspectives for further research.

References

1. Abdulla, A. K. (1999). Aspects of Ideology in Translating Literature. *Babel* 45:1, p. 1-16.
2. Barnstone, W. (1993). *The Poetics of Translation. History, Theory, Practice*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London.
3. Bassnett and Lefevere (1992). General Editor's Preface. In Lefevere, André 1992. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Routledge. p.vii-viii.
4. Boase-Beier, J. and Holman, M. (1999). Introduction. In Boase-Beier, J. and Holman, M. (eds.) *The Practices of Literary Translation. Constraints and Creativity*. St Jerome Publishing. p. 1-17.
5. Chrisafulli, E. Umberto, Eco's Hermeneutics and Translation: Between 'Manipulation' and 'Over-interpretation'. <http://www.cbs.dk/departments/english/EST/cf/Chrisafulli.doc>
6. Farahzad, F. and Allameh, T. (1999). *A Gestalt Approach to Manipulation*. Museum Tusculanum Press University of Copenhagen.
7. Gentzler, E. (1993). *Contemporary Translation Theories*. Routledge: London and New York.
8. Hermans, T. (1999). *Translation in Systems. Descriptive and System-oriented Approaches Explained*. St. Jerome Publishing.
9. Katan, D. (1999). *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. St. Jerome Publishing.
10. Lefevere, A. (1992). *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Routledge.
11. Lefevere, A. (1998). Chinese and Western Thinking on Translation. In Bassnett, S. and Lefevere, A. (eds.) *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. Multilingual Matters, pp. 12-24.
12. Lefevere, A. (1992). *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Routledge.
13. Shuttleworth, M. and Cowie, M. (1997). *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. St Jerome Publishing. Manchester, UK.
14. Rabassa, G. (1984). The Silk Purse Business: A Translator's Conflicting Responsibilities. In Frawley, W. (ed.) *Translation: Literary, Linguistic and Philosophical Perspectives*. Newark: University of Delaware Press. pp. 35-40.
15. Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Šiame straipsnyje atskleidžiami tam tikri manipuliacijos, kaip išsisukimo būdo, aspektai, ieškant atsakymų į du klausimus: pirma, ar vertimas yra manipuliacija, ir antra, kodėl taip sudėtinga sukurti šio reiškinio koncepciją.

Straipsnis įteiktas 2004 05
Parengtas spaudai 2004 12

The Author

Aiga Kramina, PhD student, University of Latvia, Latvia.
Academic interests: linguistics and sociolinguistics.
Address: Glacisstrasse 5a, Appartment 33, Germersheim, Germany.
E-mail: aiga.kramina@lu.lv

