Venuti versus Nida

A representational conflict in translation theory

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In western translation theories, Lawrence Venuti and Eugene Nida appear to be standing at too opposing poles regarding the equivalence theory, and are notable for their prominent disagreement on the issue. Their theories diverge in their responses to equivalence, and disagree, essentially, on the functions of translation as well as the aspects of an acceptable translation. This disagreement unfolded itself clearly during a conference at Binghamton University in 1991.¹ In this essay, I intend to juxtapose the exceptionally different theoretical approaches of these two prominent translation scholars. I also intend to show how Venuti’s views on translation in practice challenges Nida’s theoretical approaches to translation, and surprisingly enough his own theories particularly speaking, foreignizing and domesticating translations in which he has been extensively engaged. Finally I intend to show how Venuti’s practice² of translation challenges his earlier attack on Nida’s conceptions of the “dynamic equivalence,” “naturalness of expression” (Nida 1964: 159) and the notion of “the equivalent effect” (de Waard & Nida 1986: 9).³

Keywords: translation theories, Lawrence Venuti, Eugene Nida, equivalence theory, foreignizing versus domesticating, translating humor

“All concord is born of contraries.”
B. Jonson

Two major problems that encounter translation theories nowadays appear to be that they tend to come to conclusions without being derived from experience or practice, and that they are not reconciliatory or compatible with each other. Pym

1. Venuti and Nida’s lectures were later published as essays in Translation Perspectives IX 1996:7–23 and 195–213.
2. My observations in this paper are primarily based on Venuti’s lecture of 2003 at Binghamton University: “Translating Humor: Equivalence, Compensation, Discourse”.
3. See also (Nida 1964:177).
(2010) ironically points out, “the recent paradigms of western translation theories” are strung together only by some sort of “certitude” making them resistant to “empirical testing.” Eugene Nida and Lawrence Venuti are two prominent American translation theorists, translation historians, and international translators from English into numerous languages and vice versa. They have been prolifically engaged in teaching, researching and publishing in translation studies for decades. They have, with no doubt, made immense contributions to the development and growth of the discipline of translation studies as we see it today. However, their approaches to translation are for the most part fairly inconsistent and paradoxes to each other.

Venuti is a revolutionary contributor to the field of contemporary translation theories. A rebel he is against the political, social and cultural practices “that rank translation lowest” and lead to the anonymity of translators. Venuti is well-noted for his sharp attack on the prevailing representation of translators and translation as “marginalized” and “never secure” as opposed to the romantic conception of authorship and the original as the perpetual and the “unchanging monument of the human imagination” (Venuti 1992: 3–4). In translation theory, Venuti is well-known as the advocate of foreignizing translations or in Schleiermacher’s words, “training the target language readership to accept, even to crave, translations steeped in the foreign flavor of other originals” (quoted in Robinson 1997: 225).

Nida is a pioneering contributor to the field of translation studies. His theories and practice of translation generated a huge body of research in the field. He is as Rose (1996) points out, the founder of “the contemporary discipline of translation studies” (5). Nida (1964) has always emphasized the importance of the role of the translator as communicator (2–3), and the naturalness of translation (163), through his longstanding concept of the “dynamic equivalence,” which he first laid out in his book of 1964, Toward a Science of Translating, and which was later named “functional equivalence” by de Waard and Nida only to overcome the misinterpretation of the former designation and “to highlight the communicative functions of translating” (de Waard & Nida 1986: viii). Nida’s concept of dynamic equivalence, involves submitting the translation to the principles of naturalness and fluency, for the sake of creating an effect on the target language readers similar or equivalent to the one generated by the source language text on its readers (36). According to Nida’s notion of dynamic equivalence, the translator of poetry for instance, creates another poem –yes– but the new created poem has to be “capable of eliciting similar feeling” for “the very purpose of poetry is to a large extent the communication

of feeling, not everyday facts” (Nida 1964: 177). Thus Nida’s “dynamic” or “functional equivalence” is all about creating a similar or equivalent effect upon the target language readers or in other words it is all about communication.

In his article “Translation as Social Practice: or, The Violence of Translation,” which originated as a lecture for a conference at Binghamton University in 1991. Venuti attacked Nida’s concept of the equivalent effect describing it as mere domestication, or even imperialism veiled in the fluency or naturalness of the translation dominated by the target language culture:

Like earlier theorists in the Anglo American tradition, however, Nida has argued that dynamic equivalence is consistent with a notion of accuracy. The dynamically equivalent translation does not indiscriminately use “anything which might have special impact and appeal for receptors; it rather means ‘thoroughly understanding not only the meaning of the source text but also the manner in which the intended receptors of a text are likely to understand it in the receptor language.’”[6] For Nida, accuracy in translation depends on generating an equivalent effect in the target-language culture. […] The dynamically equivalent translation is ‘interlingual communication’ which overcomes the linguistic and cultural differences that impede it, […] an imperialist appropriation of a foreign text. (Venuti 1996: 204)

According to Nida, “the task of the true translator is one of identification. As a translator he must identify himself with the Word; as a missionary he must identify himself with the people” (quoted in Venuti 1995: 23). According to Venuti, this complete identification of the translator with the target language and culture, or the assimilation and naturalization of the linguistic and cultural differences in the translation is behind the translator’s invisibility in the western translation tradition. In his 1995 book, The Translator’s Invisibility, Venuti continued lashing at the Anglo American tradition of domestication in general and, in particular, at Eugene Nida’s approaches to translation, which essentially preach fluency and naturalness of expression. Such strategies, from the perspective of Venuti “involve domestication,” which consequently makes the text plain; one that submits itself, wholly, to the culture of the target language betraying the cultural and linguistic values of the source language text as well as the translator’s role. To Venuti (1995), Nida’s approaches, which seek fluency or naturalness of expression, are reader or communicatively oriented-translation, and are only “enlisted in the service of Christian humanism” (21).

5. The same article was published in 1993 as “Translation as Cultural Politics: Regimes of Domestication in English” Textual Practice 7 208–223. The article is based on Venuti’s seminal essay that came out in 1986 as “The Translator’s Invisibility” in Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and Arts 28: 179–212.

Venuti also criticized Nida’s statement: “that which unites mankind is much greater than that which divides, and hence there is, even in cases of very disparate languages and cultures, a basis for communication” (22). Venuti ironically describes Nida’s appeal as “democratic” since he then mentions that Nida’s statement is “contradicted by the more exclusionary values that inform his theory of translation, specifically Christian evangelism and cultural elitism” (Venuti 1995: 21).

In his criticism of Nida, Venuti was speaking from an ideological standpoint that favors foreignizing translation strategies, which in his opinion, can safeguard the cultural and linguistic features of the source language against domesticating or “interpreting the ‘foreign’ or the ‘other’ in familiar terms” (quoted in Nair 2002: 43). Venuti even went further in his criticism to the extent of associating Nida’s description of the translator’s task and his approaches to translation, mainly his dynamic equivalence, with the task and approaches of the missionary:

Nida’s concept of dynamic equivalence in Bible translation goes hand in hand with an evangelical zeal that seeks to impose on the English-language readers a specific dialect of English as well as a distinctly Christian understanding of the Bible. When Nida’s translator identifies with the target-language reader to communicate the foreign text, he simultaneously excludes other target-language cultural constituencies.

(Venuti 1995: 23)

In The Translator’s Invisibility, Venuti calls translators “to action.” He calls translators to resist canonical strategies in the forms of domestication and assimilation, which “marginalize and exploit them,” for the sake of the dominant American and Anglo languages, cultures and ideologies. However he admits that his “faith” in the power of such approach to translation, which would safeguard both the translator and the source language and culture, is only “utopian” (Venuti 1995: 307–13).

It can be argued then when comparing Nida’s conceptions of equivalence and all other relevant issues with those of Venuti as expressed in their many books and articles how impractical it seems to reconcile their theories. The two prominent scholars seem to stand at two extreme theoretical poles. Not only that but it seems that there are areas in the works of these prominent translation theorists in which a wide distance between theory and practice exists as will be discussed presently in this paper.

On 22 April 2003 at the invitation of the Translation Research and Instruction Program (TRIP) at Binghamton University and as part of a series of departmental lectures and seminars, Venuti delivered a lecture under the title “Translating

7. For Nida’s elaboration on this idea see (Nida 1964: 2).
Humor: Equivalence, Compensation, Discourse.” Venuti presented his audience, which was on the whole, very well-acquainted with his theories on translation particularly speaking his advocacy of foreignizing translations, he presented his audience with quite an unexpected approach to translation. In the Binghamton University lecture, Venuti’s new approach to translation appeared to be wholly identifying with Nida’s conception of translation which, as explained earlier in this paper, Venuti severely criticized on several occasions. At the opening of his lecture, Venuti commented on the “marginality of translators in academia,” the same subject that has occupied him in almost all of his writings.8 Paving the way for the core of his lecture, Venuti also emphasized the importance of developing the theories of translation, essentially, out of the practice of translation, “no theory can develop without practice” (Venuti 2003). Venuti then presented his audience with three translations from Italian into English, as a basis for his argument. First, there was a short poem by the “modernist poet” Giuseppi Ungaretti “Lontano” translated from Italian into English by Allen Mandelbaum as “Distantly”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lontano lontano come un cieco m’hanno portato per mano</td>
<td>Distantly distantly Like a blind man By the hand they lead me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Venuti named Mandelbaum’s translation “foreignized” emphasizing, at the same time, the point that, to him, “foreignizing does not necessarily mean literalism” (Venuti 2003). Venuti maintained that Mandelbaum’s translation preserves the foreign elements of the Italian poem without disrupting its thematic content. In other words, the poem in translation is foreignized and equivalent to its original, “the poetic diction,” the lexical and graphical elements,” “the line breaks,” “the sound effects” reflect and represent their counterparts in the original and are at the same time equivalent. The sound effects, for instance, are redeemed through “establishing (new but not literal) assonants” (Venuti 2003). In my opinion, the poem Venuti employed for his discussion does not provide an excellent example on a foreignized translation, primarily in that it does not carry any cultural component that need to be preserved in the translation when foreignized. All the foreignized features, which Venuti talked about, are either linguistic or stylistic ones. From my own perspective, the poem appears to be more domesticated and naturalized than foreignized. Unsurprisingly, the translator is bound with restricted possibili-

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8. See for instance, his introduction to Rethinking Translation. 1992:1–17, and also the first Chapter of Venuti’s The Translator’s Invisibility 1995.
ties. What else could the translator have done in order to create another poem? To make a poem, the translator has to make it fluent and natural. But fluency and naturalness are the two exact features that Venuti so often attacked strictly in his theories. Consider for example the syntax in the poem and in the translation, except for the last line, the word order in the translation and that in the original are completely compatible:

“Lontano” “distantly”
“come” “like”
“un cieco” “a blind man” (my translation using Rebora et al. 1958).

The last line exhibits an inevitable deviation of the syntax between English and Italian which is always the norm rather than the exception in translation between one language to another:

“m’hanno portato per mano.” A literal translation reads as follows:
“me/they have/led/by hand.”

By differentiating foreignization from literalism Venuti seems to be attempting to reconcile his theory, deliberately or not deliberately, with Nida’s key principles of the dynamic equivalent, the similar effect and the communicative functions of the translation, which, as discussed earlier, he severely criticized on different occasions. Venuti discussed the linguistic and the stylistic features that have been redeemed in the translation through foreignization, which to him is different from literalism (e.g., establishing new and different assonants for the sake of preserving the sound effects of the original). Because all the features Venuti discussed are either linguistic or stylistic, and because there is no obvious example in the poem to illustrate the preservation of any foreign cultural element or component in the poem, one can say that the poem is domesticated or naturalized for the sake of creating a similar poetic effect or feeling on the English target-language readers. To sum up, because the poem is not an excellent example on foreignized translations, one can say that Venuti’s foreignizing approach became the new or the third dynamic equivalence.9

In the course of the same lecture, Venuti also presented his audience with a humorous text entitled “Cara Oscar Wilde” “Dear Miss Oscar Wilde” from J. Rodolfo Wilcock and Francesco Fantasia’s Fra Teleprocu, along with two English translations. After informing his audience that he is currently working on a project,

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9. The first is Nida’s which he initiated in his book of 1964. The second which is also based on generating a similar effect, i.e., the exact same first but with a different designation, is de Waard and Nida’s in their book of 1986.
which in general terms, aims at incorporating the theory in the practice of translation, Venuti asked his audience to assess the two English translations of the Italian excerpt from *Frau Teleprocu* in terms of “which translation sounds funnier to you” (Venuti 2003). Before mentioning or rather directing his listeners’ attention to the identity of the translators, Venuti read the two English translations to his audience, line by line; slowly and carefully. While reading the second English translation of the Italian excerpt, Venuti was deliberately or not deliberately stressing certain words and phrases that existed in the second English translation but not in the first one. As appeared later Venuti believed and led his audience to believe again deliberately or not deliberately that the second translation which was Venuti’s translation is more humorous than the first one. Through the emphatic reading of specific words and phrases in his own translation, Venuti was either only trying to make the audience figure out where or how the two English translations diverge. Or it is as though Venuti wanted to lead his audience to believe that the second translation is funnier than the first one because of the words and phrases which he stressed. On the basis of the second observation, one can say that the addition was made for the sake of creating a communicatively-oriented translation to produce a similar humorous effect on the target-language receptors. Apparently what Venuti proposed or suggested through his second example is again what Nida calls the dynamic equivalence between source text and its translation.

Venuti appeared to believe strongly in the success of his new trend and criteria for assessing the quality of translations, namely and principally, the approach or the criterion of foreignizing the text and yet at the same time creating an equivalent effect as the source language text creates on its receptors. In other words, Venuti believed that for this text to be more successful or more acceptable by its English-speaking receptors the translation has to be foreignized and at the same time it should be as humorous as the original; in other words, it should generate a similar humorous effect on the target-language readers. Although his current project was at that time still in process, as he mentioned, Venuti seemed to strongly believe that his new approach is proving somehow successful. In the evaluation of the quality of the English translation of the Italian humorous text, most of the participants, who reflected different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thought in responding to Venuti’s question: “which translation sounds funnier to you, one, two, or none” (Venuti 2003) said that the second translation, which is Venuti’s translation, is funnier because it has provided more explanation that made the translated text more appealing and more familiar to the receptors. By inserting more explanation of the unusual and eccentric clothes of the people whom the speaker met, the text sounded more humorous and more appealing to the receptors. In the translation, Venuti added descriptions of odd costumes of the people who surprised the speaker, descriptions that are typically associated
with devil costumes in western cultures. Apparently, Venuti wanted to give visuals; to help receptors visualize more, which means his attention is wholly focused on the audience and the modes of communicating a humorous effect. Consider the effect the following descriptions could have on someone living, for instance, in the American culture:

- His fiancée's French tutor's devil costume: “all red leather and spandex.”
- His fiancée's devil costume: “all lace and feathers.”
- His father's devil costume: “a crimson silk smoking jacket and a black — cravat bedight with tiny crimson pitchforks.”
- His mothers’ devil costume: “a strapless scarlet sheath and slid her matching toe nails into cloven-heeled pumps” (Venuti 2003).10

Moreover, Venuti chose to insert a closing remark, which from his own point of view, could make up for or compensate the loss of the humorous effect during the process of translation from Italian into English: “One must either be a work of art, or wear a work of art” (Venuti 2003). The final remark does not exist in the Italian source text, nor does it exist in the first English translation. Apparently, it was meant to enhance the humorous effect already established through adding the above-mentioned visual descriptions. Unlike the first translation, Venuti’s translation has expanded the Italian text. It was adapted; domesticated to make up for the lost humorous effect during the process of translation. Compensation, then, was one of the techniques Venuti has employed in his translation. Surprisingly enough, he was once more echoing Nida. Compensation is “a technique which involves making up for the loss of a source text effect by creating a similar effect in the target text through means that are specific to the target language and/or text” (quoted in Baker 2001: 37). Nida and Taber (1969) “advocate the introduction of idioms into a target text as an ad hoc response to translation loss” (38). In his translation of Wilcock and Fantasia's text, Venuti believed he could compensate for the loss of the humorous effect in the process of translation by inserting descriptions of the devil costumes which are obviously culture-specific to the target-language receptors, for instance “the crimson silk smoking jacket” (Venuti 2003) of the speaker's father. Venuti’s compensation technique could be seen as an example of his adaptation of the text because of the nonexistence of such eccentric descriptions of the clothes in the original text.

10. See appendix. I have chosen to underline all added statements or alterations in L. Venuti's English translation.
Another illustrious example on Venuti’s adaptation of the Italian text is his alteration of the name of the street or place the speaker was traveling to when he encountered those people. In the original Italian text, the speaker was traveling to “Piero Gobetti” Street. By this alteration, Venuti assumed perhaps ironically that the receptors of the English text would be unfamiliar with the name of the original street and perhaps would judge the translation insufficiently if he maintains the original name. Therefore, he chose to replace the Italian “*in via Piero Gobetti,*” with the English “on via Dante Alighieri.” In the translation, the street carries the name of “*Dante.*” In the original it carries the name of “*Piero Gobetti.*” By this alteration, Venuti perhaps proposed that his translation would sound more familiar and humorous as well to the English receptors. He borrowed another Italian name from the Italian culture, but has nothing to do with the original name, except that the two Italian names refer to very famous Italian people. By the proposed modification of the name of the street in the translation, Venuti was trying to reconcile his foreignizing strategy with Nida’s equivalent effect even to the point of contradicting his own theories.

Venuti proclaimed that terms like faithful and loyal are “historical” and are subject to “change.” He justified his own “free rendering” or the addition or alteration of the above-mentioned examples, “the heterogeneous lexicon and syntax,” “the poetical archaism,” “the colloquialism,” “the exaggeration” as procedures employed to “increase precision and cohesion according to the norms of English” (Venuti 2003). It can be argued that by employing all these strategies Venuti’s attention is directed at his receptors. Therefore, one can say that his translation is a communicatively-oriented translation, aiming in the first place, to create on the receptors a similar comparable equivalent effect to the one intended by the Italian humorous text. It can also be inferred that Venuti was doing something openly similar to what Nida did when he rendered the biblical metaphor the “Lamb of God” into “the seal of God” for the sake of communicating a similar effect on certain islands’ inhabitants who never saw lambs (Nida 1964:166–7).11

In “Translating Humor: Equivalence, Compensation, Discourse,” Venuti also stated that “translation is a linguistic and cultural practice,” which inevitably entails “transforming material,” because it is first “de-contextualizing,” a process, which results in the “loss” of the overall effect of the original text and because finally it is a “re-contextualizing,” a process by which “gain” of the overall effect of the original text occurs (Venuti 2003). But “Nida is a rich source of information about the problems of loss” and gain in translation (Bassnett 1991:30). And aren’t

11. Nida’s book of 1964 is abundant with such examples.
Venuti's concepts of “de-contextualizing” and “re-contextualizing” (Venuti 2003) meant to establish equivalence in the same way Nida’s notions of “decomposition” and “recomposition of structure” do?

The process by which one determines equivalence between source and receptor languages is obviously a highly complex one. However, it may be reduced to two quite simple procedures: (1) “decomposition” of the message into the simplest semantic structure, with the most explicit statement of relationships; and (2) “recomposition” of the message into the receptor language, in such a way as to employ those correspondences which (a) conform to an F–E (a formal equivalence) translation, a D–E (dynamic equivalence) translation, or a compromise translation, and (b) provide the most appropriate communication load for the intended receptors.

(Nida 1964: 245)

Venuti concluded his remarks by saying “translation is possible and impossible, we all know that” (Venuti 2003). Even though this statement seems to have become a cliché in translation theories,12 one is obliged to say, because of all that has been presented and discussed earlier in this paper – even if this may sound exaggerated- that perhaps Venuti is referring to Nida’s article “Translation: Possible and Impossible,” the very same article that established or rather displayed Nida’s disagreement with Venuti during a conference at Binghampton University in 1991.

In “Translating Humor: Equivalence, Compensation, and Discourse,” Venuti appeared to have abandoned his antagonistic views toward domesticated translations. Venuti’s earlier attempt to name Mandelbaum’s translation of Ungaretti’s poem foreignized; his own adapted translation of the humorous excerpt from Wilcock and Fantasia’s Frau Teleprocu, obviously say that he himself and the translator in general should always be after equivalence and the principle of a similar effect, in other words more practical strategies such the communicatively-oriented translation approach. One feasible rationalization for this new drift in Venuti’s approaches to translation is the awareness that the strategy of foreignizing translations like most contemporary translation theories is not devoid of contradictions. Many theories presently are too theoretical and too resistant to application. When it comes to empiricism and testing, foreignizing like most contemporary translation theories is ardent, yes, but much idealized and remains impractical indeed. Douglas Robinson (2001), a famous assimilationist13 once criticized Venuti’s foreignizing approach to translation as being “utopian” and “impossible”:

12. See for instance, (Benjamin 1923) and (Ortega 2000).

13. See (Margala, n.d.).
Both Schleiermacher and Marx imagine a utopia in which they would be free of otherness [...] These impossible two designs most clearly converge in contemporary translation theory, perhaps, in Lawrence Venuti: a Schleiermacherian Marxist who wants simultaneously to ground translation in respect for the past and the foreign and to use translation to push the native culture toward a better future. (137)

In his lecture “Translation, Power and Resistance,” Edwin Gentzler also criticized Venuti’s approaches to translation saying translators have to be “selective” in their approaches to translation. Translators “should not be foreignizing all the time, for this will only produce bad translations,” Gentzler added, “Venuti’s way of thinking is always either or.” The fact that the translator has a “double role” or a “divided loyalty” between “two cultural” and linguistic “codes” must not be taken against the translator, on the contrary; it must be seen as a source of “strength” because to Gentzler, the translator would appear as “a lawyer who finds himself obliged to represent both the plaintiff and the defendant” (Gentzler 2003).

After his controversial lecture of 2003, Venuti has left his audience with many questions and perplexities. Once more, he seemed to be rethinking translation, yet, this time not to diverge from other theories but perhaps to reconcile his own theories which have aroused debate for decades, with ones that seem to be at an opposite pole. He is, in particular, rethinking Nida’s dynamic or functional equivalence, the concepts of gain and loss, the technique of compensation and the equivalent effect. Venuti’s realization, that his “faith” in the power of foreignizing translation being “utopian” (Venuti 1995:313) seems to have come to a climax. Venuti seems to have realized it will forever remain a utopia. In his lecture, “Translating Humor, Equivalence, Compensation, Discourse,” Venuti “who was the first Western scholar to mount an effective challenge to Nida” (Rose 1996:5), seemed to have adopted a new approach that attempts to reconcile his foreignizing theories with those of Nida, and also to defend his foreignizing approach to translation against voices, like Anthony Pym who maintains that it is a “literalist” approach or “more a word for word translation” (Pym 1995:1).

In conclusion, one is obliged to say that in “Translating Humor, Equivalence, Compensation, Discourse,” Venuti has, like what he had always done through his essays, his editing of *Rethinking Translation*, his big books: *The translator’s Invisibility* and *The Scandals of Translations- Toward an Ethics of Difference*, Venuti has, like always, made himself visible but this time not only as a theorist but as a translator-theorist. He has made himself an example of what he wants. Venuti has shown what it really means to translate while translation theories are dominated by binaries.14 In his lecture on translating humor, Venuti was looking for a

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new mode of translation theory or practice that could incorporate exclusive and paradoxical approaches to translation. Perhaps he has come across the new type of equivalence. One has to say what Anthony Pym (1996) once said, “whatever he has to say, Venuti is (highly) visible” (165).

References


Appendix


Lontano

Distantly

Lontano Lontano

Distantly distantly

come un ciero

like a blind man

m' hanno portato per mano

by the hand they lead me

From J. Rodolfo Wilcock and Francesco Fantasia, *Frau Teleprocu* (1976), translation by L. Venuti

Cara Oscar Wilde,

ieri mi è successo qualcosa di imbarazzante. Premetto che sono del segno della Vergine. La mia fidanzata è Scorpione. Stavo andando in macchina quando la professoressa di francese della mia fidanzata si spoglia nuda e indossa il suo costume da diavolo. Fermo la macchina, scendo e proseguo tranquillamente a piedi. Per strada vedo che pure altre persone si stanno vestendo da diavolo. Arrivo a casa della mia fidanzata e anche lei si spoglia e si traveste da diavola. Devo confessare che lì per lì mi è sembrata un' impertinenza. Entra il padre e le lascio immaginare la scena: anche lui era travestito da diavolo. Scambiati alcuni convenevoli, chiama la madre e questa appena mi vede comincia a spogliarsi e infila il suo costume da diavola. Tutto questo avveniva nei pressi dell'università, in via Piero Gobetti. Non so se lei ha mai visto una famiglia vestita da diavoli, e quasi peccato che nuda. Me ne andai confuso e titubante. Ora vorrei chiederle: la pare opportuno che la prossima volta che vado a trovare la mia fidanzata mi mette anche il mio costume da diavolette, che mi sta un po' stretto?

Oscar Wilde risponde: Che posso risponderle? Si affidai all'istinto. Non bisogna lasciarsi trascinare dai luoghi comuni.

Dear Miss Oscar Wilde,

Yesterday something embarrassing happened to me. First, I must tell you that I am a Virgo; my fiancée sign is Scorpio. I was driving home my fiancée French tutor when she suddenly starts to undress. She stripped naked and slipped into a devil’s costume, *all red leather and spandex.* I slammed on the brakes, jumped out, and proceeded on foot as calmly as possible. On the street I spotted other people dressed like devils. When I arrived at my fiancée’s house, she greeted me warmly and immediately started to undress, donning a devil’s costume, *all red lace and feathers.* Then and there, I must confess, it seemed rather impertinent. Her father entered, and just imagine what happened: he too was dressed like a devil, sporting a crimson silk smoking jacket and a black cravat bedight with tiny crimson pitchforks. After we exchanged a few civilities, he summoned mother who on arrival started stripping down. She then wriggled into a strapless scarlet sheath and slid her matching toe nails into cloven-heeled pumps. All this transpired in the vicinity of the university, on via Dante Alighieri. I do not know if you have ever glimpsed a family dressed like devils, but I can testify that it is almost worse than seeing them naked. It sent me reeling with perplexity and doubt.

Now here is the question I would like to ask you: when next I meet my fiancée, would it be appropriate for me to wear my devil’s costume as well (even if it is a bit tight around the waist)? Oscar Wilde replies: What can I tell you? Trust in instinct. Don’t be enthralled by commonplaces. One must either be a work of art, or wear a work of art.
Résumé

Dans les théories occidentales de la traduction, Lawrence Venuti et Eugene Nida semblent se situer à deux pôles opposés en ce qui concerne la théorie de l’équivalence et se caractérisent par leur désaccord majeur sur la question. Ils divergent dans leurs visions de l’équivalence et s’opposent essentiellement sur les fonctions de la traduction, ainsi que sur les aspects d’une traduction acceptable.

Ce désaccord s’est clairement manifesté pendant une conférence à l’université de Binghamton en 1991. Dans cet essai, j’ai l’intention de juxtaposer les approches théoriques fondamentalement différentes de ces deux grands spécialistes de la traduction. Je veux aussi montrer comment les idées sur la traduction de Venuti s’opposent en pratique aux approches théoriques de la traduction de Nida, ainsi qu’à ses propres théories, en particulier la théorie orientée vers le texte source vs la théorie orientée vers le texte cible, dans lesquelles il s’est fortement impliqué. Enfin, j’ai l’intention de montrer comment la pratique de la traduction de Venuti s’oppose à ses attaques antérieures des conceptions de Nida sur l’équivalence dynamique et le naturel de l’expression (Nida 1964 :159) et la notion d’effet équivalent (de Waard et Nida 1986 :9).

Mots-clés: théories de la traduction, Lawrence Venuti, Eugene Nida, théorie de l’équivalence, la foreignisation vs la domestication, traduction de l’humour

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