

Ideology and Theatre Translation in Contemporary Turkish Theatre

Seyhan Bozkurt Jobanputra

Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Yeditepe University
seyhan.bozkurt@yeditepe.edu.tr
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6897-5830>

Mehmet Zeki Giritli

College of Social Sciences and Humanities
Koç University
mgiritli@ku.edu.tr
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3421-4205>

Abstract. This paper aims to explore the relationship between drama translation and ideology in contemporary Turkish theatre. After delineating the distinction between state/city theatres and independent (private/alternative) theatres, it will then focus on the 2000s with a special emphasis on the translation activities of independent (private/alternative) theatres. In particular, it shall draw attention to how actor/director translators working with or for these theatres have become significant cultural agents and have challenged the *status quo* by either choosing to translate plays with provocative content or by retranslating plays that were forced to undergo (self-)censorship. The paper will also challenge the general impression in the Turkish context that the reason for retranslating classical plays into Turkish is merely a need to follow and reflect contemporary changes in the language.

Keywords: theatre translation, ideology, actor-director-translators, *habitus*.

Ideologija ir teatro tekstų vertimas šiuolaikiniame Turkijos teatre

Santrauka. Šio straipsnio tikslas – ištirti draminių tekstų vertimo ir ideologijos santykį šiuolaikiniame Turkijos teatre. Išryškinius skirtumus tarp valstybinių bei miestų savivaldybių teatrų ir nepriklausomų (privačių, alternatyvių) teatrų, dėmesys sutelkiamas į nepriklausomų (privačių, alternatyvių) teatrų vertimo veiklą pirmuoju 2000-ųjų metų dešimtmečiu. Daugiausiai šiame straipsnyje gilinamasi į tai, kaip su šiais teatrais dirbę aktoriai-vertėjai ir režisieriai-vertėjai tapo svarbiais kultūros veikėjais ir metė iššūkį teatrų *status quo*, pasirinkdami versti provokuojančio turinio pjeses arba iš naujo versti (perversti) pjeses, kurios buvo paveiktos (savi)cenzūros. Autoriai taip pat kvestionuoja bendrą Turkijos kontekste susiformavusią nuostatą, kad klasikinės pjesės iš naujo verstos (perverstos) į turkų kalbą tik dėl būtinybės sekti ir atspindėti šiuolaikinius kalbos pokyčius.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: teatro tekstų vertimas, ideologija, aktoriai-režisieriai-vertėjai, *habitus*.

Introduction

'Alternative theatres' in Turkey, as they were then called, started to gain popularity in the 90's, under the influence of British 'In-Yer-Face' theatre. The primary purpose of Turkish alternative theatres was to offer an "alternative" to state-funded theatres. Different from state theatres, which were mostly dependent on already published translations, these alternative groups translated the plays they were going to stage themselves, and the translators were either the actors or the directors of these theatres. This contributed to their positioning as resisting agents, in that they had the freedom to choose which plays to translate and how to revise existing translations. On the other hand, state theatres remained focused on "local" plays, rather than translated works (see 2018 Activity Report of state theatres). This was in tandem with the governing ideology of the country, which aimed to create a "local and national" artistic environment. Thus, these developments in the relationship between the arts and politics paved the way for "alternative" theatres to define themselves as "independent" over the last decade. The theatres that no longer identified themselves as "alternative" but rather as "independent," emerged as opposition voices against the hegemony of the state theatres, and translation became a significant medium in this process. Actor/director translators, by either translating the plays with provocative content or by retranslating plays that faced self-censorship, challenged the status quo and thus functioned as political agents as well as artists.

This study claims to contribute to the field of theatre translation in analyzing the relationship between the artistic and political stance of these theatres and their tendency to translate the plays they staged themselves and retranslate classic plays instead of using existing translations. It is based on interviews conducted with three significant figures of private/independent theatres in Turkey. After presenting our theoretical framework and methodology, we will present the results of our interviews with Emine Ayhan, a significant theatre translator who works with an independent theatre in Istanbul called Moda Sahnesi, and with Haluk Bilginer, a prominent actor, director, theatre translator and co-founder of a private theatre called Oyun Atölyesi in İstanbul. Another interviewee, Jale Karabekir, is the founder and director of the feminist theatre group Boyalı Kuş which has been actively staging plays since 2000. In the last part of our study, we will present a brief analysis of two translations, the first being İrfan Şahinbaş's translation of *King Lear*, which was staged by the Turkish State Theatre in 1958, then during the 1980–1981 season, and again during the 2002–2003 season, and the second being the retranslation of the same play by Haluk Bilginer staged by Oyun Atölyesi in the 2018–2019 season and performed for the last time in June 2022.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In this study, while discussing the actor-director translators' agency, we will refer to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. However, we will also take into account recent criticisms the concept has been subjected to. It would not be wrong to state that Translation Studies scholars have embraced Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* with great enthusiasm and have strived to shed light on the actions of translators as cultural agents using this concept.

Bourdieu (1990) defines habitus as “the generative principle of responses more or less well adapted to the demands of a certain field [which] is the product of an individual history, but also, through the informative experiences of earliest infancy, of the whole collective history of family and class” (*ibid.*: 91). According to Bourdieu, people act or react in certain situations not by following specific rules or employing serious calculations per se but are rather directed by their habitus, “a feel for the game.” Individuals' habitus is acquired as a result of a long process of inculcation beginning in the earliest infancy and becomes their second nature.

Even-Zohar stresses that this concept constitutes “an important contribution to the link between the socially generated repertoire and the procedures of individual inculcation and internalization” (Even-Zohar 1994: 24). Highlighting a similar point, Rakafet Sela-Sheffy states that the study of norms allows scholars working in the field to create “a map of “depersonalized translation tendencies,”” while also allowing them to explore how these norms are internalized and applied by translators (Sela-Sheffy 2014: 44).

Nevertheless, it has been noted that *habitus*, despite its numerous strengths, has certain drawbacks; Rakafet Sela-Sheffy argues that the concept of habitus falls short of accounting for varying individual dispositions, motivation and self-perception (*ibid.*: 44). This aspect, she points out, is what critics from various fields have picked up on and criticized about the concept of habitus, as they ask how people with a similar background can have such a diversity of dispositions (*ibid.*: 46). Sela-Sheffy writes: “In this view, translators, like all other social agents, are disposed to certain ways of doing things that suit their sense of ‘who they are and where they belong’” (*ibid.*: 45). Habitus, therefore, does not only account for how translators practice translation but also for how they become translators.

For professions like translation, as Sela-Sheffy emphasizes, where the chance of formal learning is limited, social learning and learning through non-formalised instruction become highly significant. What agents working in a specific field or profession acquire through social learning is “how to be who they are” (*ibid.*: 45). This does not only mean they gain professional qualifications but also some personal characteristics and sentiments, which become embedded in what defines them as a person (*ibid.*: 45).

Sela-Sheffy points out that just because people are involved in a similar profession, this does not imply a shared socio-economic background or status, and even if there is a parallel in socio-economic backgrounds, attitudes and dispositions will not be the same *per se* (*ibid.*: 46). To overcome these shortcomings of the concept of *habitus*, she incorporates the notion of *identity work* into her theoretical approach. This notion of “the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present and sustain personal identities” (Snow & Anderson 1987: 1348 as quoted in Sela-Sheffy 2014: 49) has been proposed to account for how individuals negotiate their identities and their notional concepts of self in their day-to-day lives (Sela-Sheffy 2014: 49). As we will demonstrate, the actor-director translators we have interviewed for this study do not necessarily define themselves as translators. For Jale Karabekir, director-translator, for instance, being a director is what primarily defines her identity and translation constitutes one of her responsibilities while staging a play. How she defines her identity is what affects her definition of theatre translation.

According to Sela-Sheffy, “unlike the structural notion of the impersonalized *habitus*, identity work inevitably involves the person’s own perception of oneself, which is not always identical with the social identity imputed to this person by others” (*ibid.*: 49). Ethnographic research seems more suited to the analysis of the notion of identity work as it entails a spectrum of activities, from the physical to the discursive. Indeed, there is perhaps a greater need for discursive analysis as translators often lack physical visibility, making their linguistic strategies more prominent. The researcher therefore relies upon the translators’ rhetorical and linguistic choices to see how they conform to or evade certain norms (*ibid.*: 50). In this study, it could be said that we have mostly relied on interviews with three actor-slash-director translators who have become involved in translation for economic or political reasons or due to other reasons related to theatre production and drama translation.

Although in translation studies, the concept of *habitus* has attracted more attention from scholars than other concepts that form Bourdieu’s theoretical model, there are other significant concepts that need to be taken into account in order to more viably explore the actions of cultural agents (such as translators). As Bourdieu explains,

any social formation is structured by way of a hierarchically organized series of fields (the economic field, the educational field, the political field, the cultural field, etc.), each defined as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy, except, obviously, in the cases of the economic and political fields. (Bourdieu 1977: 6)

Although each field may be considered as autonomous, in structural terms they are homologous in certain ways. However, due to the limitations and scope of this study, we consider our research as an inspiration for such broad and more detailed analysis of the field of theatre translation.

Before moving on to the results of our interviews and the comparison of the two translations, we would like to briefly explain the Turkish theatrical system and translation processes in these theatres to allow for a more cogent analysis of the situation between the state and private/independent theatres.

Turkish Theatrical System

Today, the Turkish theatrical system consists of three different forms of theatre: the first one is state theatres (funded by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism), the second comprise municipality theatres (funded by municipalities), and the third form includes private enterprises, which may take different names, such as ‘independent,’ ‘alternative’ or ‘private’ theatres.

As suggested by its statement of purpose, state theatres perform with the intention of serving not only artistic but also ideological purposes, regarding the education of common people, consolidation of the Turkish language, and protection of “essential” values, the last of which, also translated as “the protection of common values” (*Devlet Tiyatroları*, n.d.), is of ambiguous character. This item has formed the basis for censorship at different levels of production, from selecting the plays to be staged to directing and staging the plays, especially under the rulership of conservative governments, a claim which has also been supported by the remarks of our interviewees. It could be easily stated that in Lefevere’s terms (Lefevere 1992: 15), the state has been seen as the patron of state theatres since their inception, setting the parameters from the outside and counting on the professionals to keep the state theatres in line with their ideology (*ibid.*: 15).

State theatres currently function in twenty-three cities around the country with more than forty-three stages (as of 2020), employing around 2.200 people, 700 of whom are actors. Around 500 plays in and out of the country are staged. These statistics underline that state theatres constitute the biggest theatrical organization in the whole country. All stages and people are under the governance of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Thus actors and directors for example, have the status of civil servants, not different from any other civil servant working in any governmental organization.

The second theatrical organization in the country is municipality theatres or city theatres, the most famous of which is Istanbul City Theatre—the oldest theatrical organization in the city with roots going back to Darülbedayi-i Osmani (‘Ottoman House of Beauty’) which was founded in 1914. The institution came under the rule of Istanbul Municipality in 1931, and currently functions with ten stages around Istanbul. Other than Istanbul City Theatre, some cities such as İzmir, Adana, Eskişehir and Kocaeli have their own municipality theatres.

The last group of theatres, which is the main subject matter of this study are private or independent theatres. Unlike the state and city theatres, they are founded by

independent theatre people, and funded by ticket revenues. As explained further in the interviews section, these groups have a completely different aesthetic stance compared to subsidized theatres and are regarded as “independent” in Turkish theatrical cycles, whereas subsidized theatres such as state and city theatres are constrained by political regulations. Obviously, private/independent theatres do not have large or multiple stages like state theatres and city theatres, and most of the time old apartment buildings, warehouses and even bars are turned into stages; thus, audiences are generally limited to no more than 100–150 people.

Although private/independent theatres such as Kenter Tiyatrosu, Engin Cezzar-Gülruz Sururi Tiyatrosu, Ali Poyrazoğlu Tiyatrosu emerged as new artistic enterprises in the 1960’s, considered the “Golden Age” of Turkish theatre, private/independent theatres (then named as “alternative theatres”) took a different route starting at the end of 1990s and the beginning of 2000s and focused more on experimental works in theatre. These theatres also had and have the opportunity to apply for government subsidies; however, there are serious controversies regarding distribution of subsidies. Furthermore, the subsidies given to state theatres far exceed those given to private/independent theatres. For example, in 2017 state theatres received about 33 million euros, whereas private/independent theatres received only 800,000 euros in total, with many not receiving any subsidy at all (Draz 2019). On the other hand, there are also some private but more luxurious stages, that have been founded by renowned companies such as Zorlu in order to gain more prestige rather arguably than to prioritize artistic purposes.

Translation in State/City Theatres and Private/Independent Theatres

State theatres publish a Report of Activities every year from which we can see the number of translated plays. It is reported that during the 2018–2019 season, 177 plays were staged in total. 85 of these plays were written by Turkish playwrights, 66 were translated plays, and 26 were children’s plays. One cannot say that a large gap exists between the number of Turkish plays and translated plays; however, we have to note that in every report, increasing the number of Turkish plays has been underlined as an annual goal, which is actually in line with the foundation law of the state theatres which states that the percentage of translated plays should not exceed 40%.

Translation processes differ between state theatres and private/independent theatres and it might sometimes take years for a translated play to be staged in state theatres. Furthermore, some plays never find a chance to be staged, although they are in the repertoire. In state theatres, a translator who is willing to translate a play contacts the relevant agency for copyright of the work to be translated, and translates the play, which

is then submitted as seven copies alongside the translation permit and a petition to the Head of Drama at the General Directorate of state theatres, who sends the translated play to a minimum of two dramaturgists. Dramaturgists prepare reports on the translated play and submit them to the Head of Dramaturgy, and then to the Literary Council, which gathers at most six times during the year. The Literary Council accepts, declines or revises the translations. However, this Council, consisting of three members, sometimes declines the plays approved by the dramaturgists or approves the plays which have been declined by the dramaturgists. Thus, the final decision belongs to the Literary Council and it may not always be in line with the reports of the dramaturgists. If the translation is accepted following all these steps, it is registered in the repertory pool, which already includes over 4000 plays. If a director is interested in staging the translated play, it is submitted to the Head of Dramaturgy. All the plays submitted are evaluated in a Pre-Coordination meeting attended by the General Director, the Head of Dramaturgy, the Head Stage Director etc. and this council decides if the play is appropriate in terms of technical and cultural issues. The council is expected to spare around 70% of the whole repertory to local plays, in other words, plays written by Turkish playwrights. After all these stages are completed and the translated play is approved for the stage, the casting phase starts. (Birkiye 2019). However, the decisions of the Literary Council are not always transparent, and the Council may ask the translator to make as many revisions as the Council requires. This system has been criticized as “bulky bureaucracy” by all of our interviewees.

Analyzing the current archives of the state theatres published on their website, it can be seen that there are 4362 plays in total in the repertory, 2054 of which are translated plays. The number of Turkish plays and translated plays are nearly equal. Thus, looking at the numbers provided by Birkiye (2019), it may be concluded that the number of translated plays has significantly increased recently; however, the quota assigned to the staging of translated plays remains the same. It is also evident that nearly 50% of the translated plays which are in the repertory have never been staged. To give some examples, George Orwell’s play *1984* was included in the repertory in 1987 but has never been staged, Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* was included in the repertory in 2019 and also not staged, Bryan Delaney’s *The Onion Game* was translated in 2011 and not staged, and Pinter’s *Betrayal* was translated in 2015 and not staged, Pinter’s *Family Voices* was translated in 2016 and not staged. Examples abound but an interesting point to conclude is that most contemporary playwrights, who are staged frequently in private/independent theatres, are not staged in state theatres, although they are translated. In short, translations for theatre productions in state theatres do not make it to the stage most of the time.

The situation is similar in city or municipal theatres. The process of submitting a translated work to city theatres requires the approval of a Literary Council just as in

state theatres, although for some productions, the city theatre managers may ask individual translators to translate specific plays, one example of which will be detailed in the interviews section. Looking at the number of plays staged every theatre season, city theatres have obviously a much more limited repertoire compared to state theatres. In the 2013–2014 theatre season, a total of 34 plays (excluding plays for children), were staged by the Istanbul Municipal Theatre, 20 Turkish and 14 translated. There is no data available on “accepted but not staged” translations. As could be seen, translation in state theatres and city theatres is a highly bureaucratic process and is mostly conducted by people outside the field of theatre, and some translations are never staged.

This trend started to change with the rise of private/independent theatres, especially at the beginning of the 2000s. Many private/independent theatres in this period were interested in writing their own plays, translating contemporary plays that had never been translated and staged before or retranslating classic plays. Private/independent theatres do not have Literary Councils as state and city theatres do and they work in a more collective manner, undertaking the translations themselves most of the time. Thus, a play is generally translated by a private theatre only if it is to be staged, unlike state theatres, which do not stage some translated works for decades. Another important change with the private or independent theatres is that, as these theatres are mostly not supported by political entities but are rather private enterprises, they are relatively independent in selecting which plays to translate and stage as they do not need to obtain permission from the Ministry or from the General Directorate; thus, the artists collectively decide on the repertoire, which explains why they are named “independent theatres.”

However, this does not necessarily mean that private/independent theatres always stage plays and translations of higher quality compared to state and city theatres. Only a small minority of private/independent theatres function actively for longer periods whereas there are many that stage a play over one season and disappear the next. It should be noted that state theatres have audiences totaling two million a year, a number which is incomparable to the number of audiences in private/independent theatres, although there is no concrete data regarding the total audience numbers in private/independent theatres. Of course, ticket prices are a great factor in this. As state and city theatres are funded by political entities, ticket prices are much more affordable compared to those of private/independent theatres, which are funded only by ticket sales, leading to unfair competition, as strongly emphasized by our interviewees.

Interviews

Ten private/independent theatres were contacted to take part in this study, three of which responded positively. Although state theatre and city theatre representatives were

contacted, neither of them responded to our inquiry; thus, the interviews were limited to three private/independent theatres and results may therefore not represent the general opinion. However, all three interviewees agreed on specific points listed below, which makes the results of the study promising. The criteria when determining the sample group were: a) groups which have been actively staging plays for a minimum of five years; b) groups which have either retranslated classic plays or translated contemporary plays which have not been staged in state and city theatres. Private theatre groups who have been active for less than five years and groups that use existing translations were excluded from the study, which resulted in a limited number of interviews.

We conducted the interviews in accordance with the interviewees' preferences and convenience. Haluk Bilginer preferred to record his answers, Jale Karabekir agreed to a Zoom Call and Emine Ayhan wrote the answers to the questions and sent them to us via e-mail. The interviews were semi-structured and the questions were adapted during the interviews based on the responses of the interviewees. The questions mostly focused on the reasons for translating/retranslating their own plays, their views on the existing translations of state/city theatres, and the relationship between politics and theatre translation. Below we will discuss their answers by focusing on the common points they touched upon in their replies.

Discussion of Interviews

Our first interviewee, Jale Karabekir, is the founder and director of a feminist theatre group Boyalı Kuş which has been actively staging plays since 2000. Before that, she started her theatrical activities with women living in different parts of Istanbul in 1996. Our second interviewee Haluk Bilginer is an actor, translator, and director. He won Emmy Best Actor Award for his part in the *Şahsiyet* series in 2019. Aside from his career in Turkey, he has also worked in the United Kingdom. He is the co-founder of Oyun Atölyesi, a theatre hall in Kadıköy/İstanbul which has been active since 1999. Haluk Bilginer retranslated *King Lear* and *Macbeth* in the 2010–2011 season, and has also translated modern plays such as *Kvetch* (1986) by Steven Berkoff, *Woyzeck* (1913) by Georg Büchner, and *Fool for Love* (1983) by Sam Shepard. The primary reason Bilginer is included in this study is that his theatre group Oyun Atölyesi is considered one of the pioneers of private/independent theatres in Istanbul, and has been staging both classic and contemporary plays for over 20 years. Our third interviewee Emine Ayhan is a theatre and social sciences translator who has been working actively with Moda Sahnesi ('Moda Stage'), one of the most famous private theatre groups on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, and who has retranslated Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*. Although Ayhan is not an actor or director herself, she has

been included in the study as she has been working closely with actors and directors, as a theatre translator. Her answers to our questions revolve around her Shakespeare translations. The first significant result gained from the interviews was that the actor/director translators interviewed, Haluk Bilginer and Jale Karabekir, do not identify themselves as “translators;” but they do consider translation one of the duties of a theatre person when needed.

Karabekir stated numerous times during the interview that she does not define herself as a translator, but rather as a “theatre person.” For Karabekir, theatre translation has always been part of their group’s creative process just as other various components of the process, such as technical preparations, rehearsals, and even ticket sales. Linking this to her educational background as a graduate of a Drama department, Karabekir explains that, as students, they were asked to read plays in their original languages and translate them when needed for dramaturgical purposes. However, she argues that identifying oneself as a translator requires a devotion to translation as a profession, which she thinks is time-consuming for a theatre person.

According to Karabekir, there is a unique language of theatre, and phonetics play a significant role in understanding this language. In the translation process, the way actors will enunciate the words should be considered when deciding which words to use for the translation. In her view, the Turkish that is used in daily life differs from the Turkish used on stage, and the translator should be aware of this.

Similarly, in terms of his experience as a theatre translator, Bilginer believes that a translator of theatre plays should certainly have a direct connection with theatre. As he elaborates, we learn that he first physically performs all the lines he translates and sees if the translation is suitable for stage performance. He emphasizes that knowing a language does not mean that one can necessarily translate from it. According to Bilginer, how words are delivered by actors live is a factor in the translation process as language is a living organism and transforms constantly, an aspect that is usually ignored by the translators. He says that in some translations the use of arcane language, such as words of Persian or Arabic origin, most of which are unfamiliar to the new generation, can alienate the audience.

The way both Jale Karabekir and Haluk Bilginer criticize the existing translations and the way they explain how they approach translation reflects the distinction between “the translation of drama as literature,” and “the translation of drama for the stage” (Hanna 2016: 54). Karabekir does not find published translations “functional” for staging purposes. The word she uses to describe published translations is “literary.” Some of them, she says, are not fluent enough for the stage as they are mostly word for word translations. She recommends that before these translations are published they be read out aloud so the translator can understand whether it is suitable for the stage or not.

Regarding this point, Bilginer and Ayhan place special emphasis on Shakespeare translations. Ayhan stated that one of the biggest challenges faced in understanding Shakespeare is the preconceived image of Shakespeare plays as pieces of “high art.” She says that during her university education and her readings of Shakespeare, she came to realize that Shakespeare was considered a part of popular folk culture rather than high art. As she recalls, this was a turning point in her understanding of Shakespeare. According to Ayhan, up until the last few decades, treating Shakespeare’s works as high art and translating them accordingly had been the prevailing tendency in Turkey. She links this approach to the new Republic’s “inferiority complex” against a canonical author of the Western world. Rather than focusing on performance aspect, translations adopted a more “literary” approach, which was also the prevailing concept in the staging of Shakespeare in Turkish state theatres. According to Ayhan, this conception of Shakespeare was also reflected in the exaggerated costumes and in the acting and gestures utilized in Shakespeare plays staged in state and city theatres.

Like Emine Ayhan, Bilginer gives examples from Shakespeare translations and he also stresses that Shakespeare’s use of slang and vernacular language has often been neglected in translations, most probably due to the fact that Shakespeare was generally considered as a “serious” and “high art” playwright. Bilginer went on to state that Shakespeare wrote his plays mostly for public entertainment and that “audiences used to drink beer and watch what was happening on stage with spontaneous reactions. Sometimes they used to go out, drink another beer, come back and continue watching” (Bilginer 2021).

As we have already explained, the translation process in the state/city theatres and private/independent theatres differs greatly, which might be considered a significant factor in this approach to Shakespeare translations elaborated by our interviewees. Especially in terms of classic playwrights such as Shakespeare, state/city theatres mostly prefer the translations published by the Translation Bureau, a state-sponsored translation agency established in 1946 and which contributed greatly to the canon formation in Turkish literature. As is the case with İrfan Şahinbaş’s translation of *King Lear*, whose analysis will soon follow, these translations also follow the Bureau’s demand for full translations without any additions or omission and without any substantial departures from the original, with the expectation of the form and style of the original being faithfully reproduced in Turkish. This is true for the printed version. Although the state theatres use these old, published translations, they also make changes to translations in terms of word choices, often opting for contemporary synonyms while also omitting parts of the play for the sake of brevity. However, in state/city theatres, vulgar words, slang and obscenities are still avoided, meaning the language used in the plays seems out of tune with contemporary language used in daily life. Thus, the state/city theatre

and independent theatre versions of classic plays differ greatly, whereby state theatre versions maintain the state theatres' ideology of educating the masses by not deviating from standard Turkish.

The distinction between “the translation of drama as literature,” and “the translation of drama for the stage” brings us to the notion of how translation is viewed by state/city and private/independent theatres. Ayhan states that her primary motivation in retranslating Shakespeare for the Moda Sahnesi was to challenge this “*ideolojik katılma*,” the ‘ideological *status quo*’ prevalent in Shakespeare translations in Turkey. Saying this, she also stresses that the director Kemal Aydoğan, one of the founders of the Moda Sahnesi, felt the same need when he decided to stage Shakespeare, and it was this shared vision that brought Aydoğan and Ayhan together. Highlighting the heavy bureaucracy that exists within state theatres, Ayhan states that in countries such as Turkey, state institutions are part of a calcified process, one which she also described as monotonous or one-dimensional. For Ayhan, private/independent theatres provide a relatively freer artistic environment as they are “autonomous structures” that are not restricted by the heavy bureaucracy of state and city theatres and are thus able to bring new perspectives and interpretations to the (re)-translation process. She illustrates this by saying that, unlike her experience with state or city theatres, she has never been asked to censor or omit any sections in her translations. Another point she makes is the importance of words and scenes used frequently by Shakespeare that may be considered by some obscene or vulgar. For Ayhan, the “high-art image” of Shakespeare might have resulted in the censoring of these scenes in previous translations. However, this has not been the case in her translation process for Moda Sahnesi.

In our interview with Haluk Bilginer, Bilginer also highlighted the problem of the structure of state theatres, stating that, “There is no such thing as a state theatre in any other part of the world. It is the responsibility of the state to support/fund all theatres. There are theatres subsidized by the state, but there are no ‘state theatres.’” He uses the metaphor of the *öz evlat-üvey evlat*, ‘the child and stepchild,’ to explain the unequal treatment by the state regarding the city and state theatres, on the one side, and the private/independent theatres, on the other. As he further explains, at certain points it becomes impossible to stage a play with twenty actors, for example, at private/independent theatres as they are not funded as much as state and city theatres and, due to a lack of resources, artists are required to do the bulk of the work at private/independent theatres, sometimes including translation.

Karabekir also claims that private/independent theatres have a relatively freer artistic environment compared to the heavy bureaucracy of state and city theatres, where the repertoire is decided by civil servants rather than artists; however, she also stresses that translating their own plays served practical rather than ideological purposes. She

says they had to find practical ways of solving problems and working within their small community as they did not get any support from the state. Karabekir's theatre group has not been found eligible for state assistance (certain amount of funding provided to certain private theatre groups yearly but which is not comparable to what state theatres and city theatres receive) due to the content of the plays they stage. Although she did not specify the names of the plays found unsuitable, she claims that their group is among the "banned" groups as they are a "feminist" group, and will never be able to receive any financial assistance.

A number of classic plays, mostly Shakespeare, which had to undergo a certain amount of censorship due to cultural and political reasons in state and city theatres as explicated by our interviewees, have been retranslated by private/independent theatres by taking into consideration the fact that Shakespeare was actually a popular folk poet of his time, rather than a "high-art poet," and that he used vernacular and obscene language very frequently in his plays. In this way, new translators of Shakespeare were able to present a new Shakespeare closer to the 'real' artist to Turkish audience, which mirrored the rise of private/independent theatres challenging the status quo of state and city theatres. In parallel with this and related to Shakespeare translations in terms of state and private/independent theatres, we would like to present some examples from İrfan Şahinbaş's *King Lear* translation for state theatres and Haluk Bilginer's retranslation of the same play.

Translation Analysis

In this analysis, we will use the manuscript of Haluk Bilginer's translation of *King Lear*¹ first staged in 2018–2019 season and İrfan Şahinbaş's translation staged by Ankara State Theatre in 1983 (*Kral Lear* 1983). We were able to access its version broadcast on TRT2, a state channel for arts and culture, later uploaded on YouTube. İrfan Şahinbaş's translation was published in 1959 by the Ministry of Education and reprinted several times afterwards. İrfan Şahinbaş was born in 1913 and died in 1990. He was a professor of English literature at Ankara University and was a significant figure in the establishment of its Department of Drama. He was also involved in the translation activities of the Republican Period and had an active role in the Translation Bureau.

In Haluk Bilginer's retranslation, at the beginning we see a note saying "Çeviren (Translator): Haluk Bilginer" and "Düzenleyen (Edited by): Muharrem Özcan," who is also the director of the play. In the endnotes, we find the following explanation before the actual notes: "In this edition, there are omissions from and additions to the original

¹ We would like to thank Haluk Bilginer for the courtesy of sharing the manuscript of his translation with us.

text. The order of some parts has been changed.” The word used for what we would call “omissions” is “trimming” in this explanation. This information is followed by the following list, which is the last page of the manuscript, of changes that have been made. The compiler of the list is not known (Bilginer 2020: 70):

- 1- There is no *ön oyun* (‘curtain raiser’) in the original text.
- 2- The related section is taken from William Shakespeare’s play *A Winter’s Tale*.
- 3- In the original text, the scene opens with the dialogue between Kent and the Earl of Gloucester. Gloucester’s lines in this scene are added to the second scene of Act One.
- 4- In the original text, this scene starts with Edmund’s tirade. In this version, the lines by Gloucester mentioned in Note 3 are merged with Edmund’s tirade. In this part, Gloucester and Edgar are on stage in spirit.
- 5- This part is in Act 3 Scene 3 in the original text.
- 6- Act 3 Scene 1 is not included in this edition.
- 7- This part is in Act 3 Scene 4 in the original text.
- 8- Act 4 Scene 3 is not included in this edition.

Actually, these explanations cover only a small number of the omissions from the original play. Many of the dialogues are highly condensed and at some points summarized by Haluk Bilginer. In our interview with Bilginer, he states that no stage version of Shakespeare plays lasts as long as the original version as it is difficult to hold on to the audience’s attention for such a long period of time. We can say that overall Bilginer’s translation reflects the points he made in his interview with us about Shakespeare’s style. His choice of words reflect daily and colloquial Turkish with idioms or phrases which would be easily understood by the youth of today who are unfamiliar with many arcane words of Arabic or Persian origin that are still in circulation. We even come across certain slang words and words or phrases that may be considered profanities which would never be allowed to be uttered in any state theatre. Here are a few examples from the translation and their backtranslations:

Example 1:

Source Text:

FOOL: For you know, uncle, the hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long, that it’s had it head bit off by it young. So out went the candle, and we were left darkling. (Shakespeare 2015: 55)

Target text (Haluk Bilginer)

SOYTARI: *Gördün mü amca? Besle kızımı, oysun gözünü.* (Shakespeare 2020: 19)

Backtranslation:

THE CLOWN/JESTER: Have you seen this, uncle? Feed his daughter, scoop out his eye.

Example 2:

Source Text:

KENT: Draw, you rascal! You come with letters against the King, and take Vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father. Draw, you rogue, or I'll so carbonado your shanks!- draw, you rascal, come your ways! (2015: 85)

Target Text (HB)

KENT: *Siktir! Hem kralın aleyhinde mektuplar taşırsın buraya, hem de babasına karşı gelen o kuklanın yordakçılığını yaparsın ha? Gel! Gel! Gel de bildireyim sana haddini.* (2020: 28)

Backtranslation

Fuck off! Not only do you carry correspondence against the king here but you also lick the boots of that clown that defies his father? Come, come this way! Come, so I may put you in your place.

Example 3:

Source Text:

KENT: Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain: I have seen better faces in my time than stands on any shoulder that I see before me at this instant. (2015: 89)

Target Text (Haluk Bilginer):

KENT: *Ben gerçeği dobra dobra söylerim. Götüme kaş göz çizsem, hepimizden daha güzel olur.* (2020: 30)

Backtranslation:

KENT: I speak the plain truth. If I were to draw a set of eyes on my own backside, it would still be more beautiful than you all.

Example 4:

Source Text:

CORNWALL: This is some fellow who having been praised for bluntness, doth affect a saucy roughness and constraints the garb quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he; an honest mind and plain, he must speak truth; and they will take it, so; if not, he is plain. These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness harbor more craft and more corrupter ends than twenty silly-ducking observants that stretch their duties nicely. (2015: 89)

Target Text (Haluk Bilginer):

CORNWALL: *Anlaşılan bu adamı dobra konuşuyor diye o kadar övmüşler ki, böyle küstahça açık sözlülüğün çıkımı çıkardı.* (2020: 30)

Backtranslation:

CORNWALL: Clearly, they have praised this man so much for being forthright that his forthrightness has become rotten.

In the first example, “Feed his daughter, scoop out his eye” is a play on a Turkish idiom “Feed the crow, he will scoop out your eye” (“*Besle kargayı, oysun gözünü*”) which means, the person you treat well will eventually betray you. This play on the idiom cre-

ates a very humorous impact when uttered. “*Siktir*” (‘Fuck off’) and “*Göt*” (‘backside’ or ‘butt’), which would again create a funny atmosphere in the theatre, are serious profanities that one would not encounter in a play staged in state theatres. The last examples could give an idea how condensed Haluk Bilginer’s translation is and “*cılığını çıkarmak*” which is a highly colloquial saying in Turkish would not be preferred in a play again staged in state theatres.

When we look at İrfan Şahinbaş’s translation, the difference between the printed version and the staged version can be easily discerned. Some dialogues are shortened in the staged version, though not as much as in Haluk Bilginer’s translations, and some arcane words (actually the ones Bilginer mentioned in his criticism) are replaced with new ones such as “*ihsan-bağış*” – “*sıhhat-sağlık*,” “*vazife ve vecibeler*” – “*ödev ve görevler*.” However, apart from the shortened versions and the replacement of words of Arabic and Persian origin, we see that the stage version follows the printed version in terms of sentence structures. Below is an example to demonstrate the difference between Bilginer’s and Şahinbaş’s translations with their backtranslations:

Example 5:

Source Text:

KENT: Let it fall rather, though the fork invade. The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly. When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man? Think’st thou that duty shall have dread to speak, when power to flattery bows? To plainness honour’s bound, When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy doom, and in thy best consideration check This hideous rashness. Answer my life, my judgement, Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least, Nor are those empty-hearted, whose low sounds Reverb no hollowness. (2015: 17)

Target Text (Haluk Bilginer)

KENT: *Bırak, fırlasın gelsin, yüreğimi parçalasın. Ne yapıyorsun koca adam? Hayatım üzerine yemin ederim ki küçük kızın seni ötekilerden az sevmiyor. Kısıt sesi yankı yapmıyor diye kalbi boş sanma kimseyi. Cezanı geri al, aklını başına topla ve bu korkunç hatayı düzelt.* (2020: 3)

Backtranslation: Let him go, let it fly forth and shatter my heart. What are you doing, old man? I swear on my life that your young daughter does not love you less than the others. Just because a lowered voice does not echo, do not presume it to be empty. Take back your punishment, come to your senses and correct this terrible mistake.

Target Text (İrfan Şahinbaş)

KENT: *Bırak gitsin! İsterse ucu kalbimi delsin! Lear çıldırdıktan sonra Kent saygısızlık etmiş ne çıkar? İhtiyar, ihtiyar, ne yapıyorsun? Haşmet, çılığınlığa düşerse, açık sözlülük şeref borcu olur. Bırakma iktidarı! İyi düşün! Bırakma iktidarı! İyi düşün! Bu tehlikeli aceleye gem vur. Hayatımla temin ederim ki, seni en az seven küçük kızın olmadığı gibi, hafif sesleri boşluk içinde tınlamayan kimselerin yürekleri de bomboş demek değildir.* (Shakespeare 1959: 17)

Backtranslation: Let him go! Let him pierce my heart if he so wishes! After Lear has lost his mind, what does it matter if Kent is disrespectful? Old man, old man, what are you

doing? When majesty succumbs to madness, honesty becomes a debt of honour. Do not give up power! Think hard! Do not give up power! Think hard! Restrain this haste. I swear upon my life, just as your young daughter does not love you least, do not believe the hearts of those who light voices do not echo in the emptiness are also empty.

It can easily be discerned from the back translation how closely Şahinbaş's translation follows the source text, which was, as we have already pointed out, a policy of the Translation Bureau. Neither in the stage nor the published version are there vulgar words, profanities or slang items.

The general impression in the Turkish context as to the reasons for retranslating classic plays into Turkish is the need to simply follow and reflect contemporary changes in the language. However, the differences between Şahinbaş and Bilginer translations and Bilginer's own utterances demonstrate that there is also a huge gap between how Shakespeare is presented to the audience in a state theatre and in an independent theatre. On the one hand, we have an image of Shakespeare as a serious playwright and on the other hand we come across a Shakespeare who can appeal to the masses. It can thus be said that the reason for retranslating classic plays such as *King Lear* are not only due to changes of register, tone and style in Turkish (as the staged version of Şahinbaş's translation also replaced some words of Persian or Arabic origin with more contemporary ones) but also in how independent or alternative theatres position themselves politically and ideologically in the theatrical system in Turkey.

On retranslation, Şehnaz Tahir-Gürçağlar (2009: 236) argues that "the interaction between the individual translator and the larger context in which retranslations are produced reminds us that retranslation is a function of the dynamics of the target context rather than a response to any inherent properties of the source text." It could easily be argued that retranslations in the Turkish context actually serve to criticize the artistic, economic and political constraints that private/independent theatres are exposed to within the theatre system in Turkey.

Conclusion

In Turkey, the structure and boundaries in the field of drama translation are intricately related to the field of theatre production, as most performing theatres in Turkey, such as state/city theatres, are state-subsidized, which not only affects the process of selecting which plays will be staged but also the process of translation. As far as the political and artistic position of private/independent theatres is concerned, we noticed, and our interviewees agreed, that in Turkey, state-sponsored theatres adhere to a certain ideology and that one of the principles of that ideology is to educate the masses. The

plays selected for the stage and their translations are therefore produced within certain boundaries, and actors and directors need to follow certain rules and procedures. All three interviewees agreed that private/independent theatres provide a freer atmosphere in terms of both the selection of the plays staged and the translation processes. Our analysis of Shakespeare retranslation by Haluk Bilginer demonstrated that he was free to furnish his translation in a way he deemed necessary and which reflected the image of Shakespeare as not part of a high culture but as a popular playwright of his time.

Although none of the interviewees talked about positioning themselves against the agents or authorities in the state/city theatres, they criticize the bureaucracy in subsidized theatres. Obviously, actor/director translators in private/independent theatres initially began their translations not for ideological or artistic reasons but rather for practical and economic reasons, viz., a lack of resources. However, this process resulted in them becoming innovative structures that challenged the *status quo* in the theatrical world, with the translation playing an active role in this transformation. This may be linked to their identity as theatre people, people who can fall on their theatrical knowhow when making decisions related to translation. This allows us to conclude that including *identity work* in the analysis of habitus seems essential as it compensates for the impersonalized structure of habitus. People who engage in similar tasks do not usually come from similar backgrounds and other significant features of their identity have a bearing in how they perform these tasks, as in the case of Bilginer and Karabekir.

References

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987/1990. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, translated by Matthew Adamson. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Even-Zohar, Itamar. 1994. Culture Planning and the Market: Making and Maintaining Socio-Semiotic Entities. Paper delivered at the Dartmouth Colloquium *The Making of Culture*. Dartmouth College, 22–27 July 1994.
- Korad Birkiye, Selen. 2019. Repertuar Seçiminden Prodüksiyona DT’de Çeviri Oyunlar. *Tiyatro Tiyatro Dergisi*. <https://tiyatrodergisi.com.tr/repertuar-seciminden-produksiyona-dtde-ceviri-oyunlar/>.
- Devlet Tiyatroları*. n.d.. <http://www.devtiyatro.gov.tr>.
- Draz, Ayşe. 2019. Theatre in Turkey. In *Dutch Culture Centre for International Cooperation*, edited by Chantal Hamelinck and Telke Asselbergs.
- Hanna, Sameh. 2016. *Bourdieu in Translation Studies: The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Shakespeare Translation in Egypt*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Lefevere, André. 1992. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London: Routledge.

Sela-Sheffy, Rakafet. 2014. Translators' Identity Work: Introducing Micro-sociological Theory of Identity to the Discussion of Translators' *Habitus*. In *Remapping Habitus in Translation Studies*, edited by Gisella M. Vorderobermeier [*Approaches to Translation Studies*, 40]. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi. 43–55.

Tahir Gürçağlar, Şehnaz. 2009. Retranslation. In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha. Second edition. London/New York: Routledge. 233–236.

Interviews

Ayhan, Emine. July 23, 2021. Written Interview by e-mail.

Bilginer, Haluk. June 29, 2021. Recorded Interview.

Karabekir, Jale. June 24, 2021. Zoom Interview.

Translation Analysis

Shakespeare, William. 2020. *Kral Lear*. (trans. Haluk Bilginer).

Shakespeare, William. 2015. *King Lear*. (eds. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine). NY: Simon and Schuster.

Shakespeare, William. 1959. *Kral Lear*. (trans. İrfan Şahinbaş). Ankara: MEB.