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Self-Translated: Beckett

Sinem Sancaktarođlu Bozkurt

Samuel Beckett, in addition to his titles as an avant-garde novelist, playwright, theatre director and poet, was also a translator. Beckett's translation experience can be grouped into three by using the typology of the Czech structuralist Roman Jakobson. Jakobson divides translation into three categories: Interlingual translation, intralingual translation and intersemiotic translation. Intralingual translation or rewording refers to an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language, while interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. And intersemiotic translation or transmutation means an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems (114).

To start with intersemiotic renderings, one of Beckett's experiences as a translator is through his contributions to the stage adaptations of his theatre plays. From the mid-1960s, Samuel Beckett himself directed all his major plays in Berlin, Paris or London. In other words, he has interpreted or adapted verbal signs of his plays into non-verbal sign systems by adding d cor, costume, music, etc.

For most of these productions he meticulously prepared notebooks for his personal use. The series of *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett* contain revised texts for each of Beckett's major plays, which include Beckett's many changes, corrections, additions and cuts. Thus, Beckett, while working as a theatrical director, is also experiencing intralingual translation as well as an intersemiotic one, since he changed his own texts within the same language to that extent that "even within a single language there are multiple versions of the texts" (Sabljo 165).

As for interlingual renderings, at the beginning of his career, Samuel Beckett has rendered the works of foreign writers into English/French. For example, "in the early 1930s, the literary review *This Quarter* had published his "englishings" of Italians [...] as well as of French surrealist poets [...]" (qtd. in Grutman 2013, 193). And then Beckett switched to French as a target language, and he translated a fragment from Joyce's *Work in Progress* (the future *Finnegans Wake*) (qtd. in Grutman 2013, 193). He continued translating the works of foreign writers during his career. For example, "in 1949, he was mandated by UNESCO to translate an anthology of Mexican poetry edited by Octavio Paz (Grutman 2013, 190-191). In addition, although he sometimes worked with professional translators¹, most of the time he translated almost all of his own works bidirectionally from English into French and from French into English.

The main focus of this study is Beckett's interlingual translations of his own works, in other words Beckett's identity as a self-translator. To this end, the bilingual character of Samuel Beckett, his conscious awareness of his option (Grutman 2009, 257) of languages, the notion of self-translation, difference of self-translators from ordinary translators, the notion of authority, and the blurred boundary between

1 Samuel Beckett collaborated with Alfred Péron on the translation of *Murphy*, with Ludovic and Agnès Janvier on the translation of *Watt* and *From an Abandoned Work* and with Robert Pinget on the translation of *Embers* and *All That Fall* into French language. Beckett also collaborated with Patrick Bowles on the translation of *Molloy* in English language (Sabljo 164).

the original and translation will be discussed within the framework of Beckett's *oeuvre*. In addition, translations of Beckett's works into Turkish will be discussed in terms of the translator's language choice for the source text by examining some of the prefaces of the Turkish translations.

In order to understand Beckett's experience as a self-translator, it would be useful to discuss the bilingual character of Beckett. Beckett wrote his plays and prose in two different languages, namely English or French during different times of his life, which indicated different stylistic features for his works. He began writing in English, switched to French and then returned to English. Samuel Beckett, Irish born in Dublin, began writing in English during the 1930's, but after the Second World War, he decided to write exclusively in French (Sabljo 164). As Ruby Cohn, one of the first to mention the self-translations produced by Beckett, has stated in her article, after "Beckett wrote *Watt*, his last major work in English" (613), he "shifted from his native English into French for fiction and drama," (613). In 1956, Beckett returned to English as an original language of creation, with the writing of his first radio play, *All That Fall*. From that point on, Beckett self-translated all of his texts or wrote versions in two languages at the same time (Sabljo 164).

Samuel Beckett was not bilingual by birth. He became fluent in French through education, he studied French and Italian language and literature at Trinity College in Dublin, and through long visits to France and finally, by living in another culture; from 1937 till his death in 1989, Beckett lived in Paris (Sabljo 163).

The reason for Beckett's shift between languages is explained by many different critics. As, Mirna Sindić Sabljo has stated, "Beckett's bilingualism was entirely voluntary, considering the fact that he was not persecuted, for political, economic or religious reasons, as many exiled artists have been" (164). According to Ann Beer, "his need for French can be seen as driven partly by aesthetic and partly by psychological needs" (214). "In conversations with Juliet Charles, [Beckett, himself] explained [his option of languages] that French "allowed him to escape

the habits inherent in the use of native language” , while saying that in French it was easier to write without a style (qtd. in Sabljo 164). “Writing in French gave Beckett control over his style and allowed him to create texts that were quite different from the work he had previously written in English. His style in French was bare, uncomplicated, basic and simple” (Sabljo 164).

As indicated above, Beckett has a good command of both languages, which can make him a “perfect” translator, or is it really so? The first work which Beckett self-translated or more truly translated in collaboration with the translator Alfred Péron is *Murphy*, which was written in English. Starting with *Murphy*, Beckett translated almost every work of his into English or French. He was not constant in his choice of source and target languages, or Beckett did not reserve his mother tongue for source texts or translations, and he switched from English to French, and vice versa. For example, Beckett reversed the linguistic direction in *Murphy*, while he was translating *En Attendant Godot* from French into English after the strong “pressure for an English version of the play” (Cohn 616). Thus, he is considered to be the most famous self-translator of the world thanks to his “unprecedented series of self-translations which are unique in the history of literature” (Cohn 613). Of course, there are different examples to self-translators²; however Beckett is the one, who has received most critical attention due to his systematic rendering of his works into another language.

Before studying the self-translations of Beckett and their reflections in Turkish translations, it may prove useful to give a brief definition of the term self-translation and its reflections in translation studies. Anton Popovič, a fundamental Slovak translation scholar and a text theoretician, in his book titled *A Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation*, has given a basic definition of self-translation. He has stated that self-translation is “the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself” (qtd. in Montini 306). Rainier Grutmann, one of the translation scholars who mainly studied self translation, talks about consecutive and simultaneous

2 For example Vladimir Nabakov, Elif Shafak

self-translations. According to him, consecutive self-translations are prepared only after the completion or even publication of the original, while simultaneous self-translations are produced even while the first is still in progress (2009, 259).

In terms of consecutive and simultaneous self-translations, Beckett resorted to both modes at different stages in his career. For example, he translated *Murphy*, which he wrote in English in 1938, with the help of Alfred Péron into French, almost a decade later. As Grutmann states “[i]n this case, the English text had already led an autonomous existence, thereby limiting the possibilities of innovation” (2009, 259), however there are still alterations in the self-translated version. In addition, there are instances when Beckett resorted to simultaneous self-translations. For example, while he was writing *Bing* (French “original”), he was also translating it into English. As Brian Fitch has stated while he was completing the English translation of *Bing*, he did not “work simply from the final version of *Bing*, but on occasion takes as his source the earlier drafts of the original manuscripts” (70). This process may have caused the creation of a linguistic link between the source text and the target text, which is hard to observe in ordinary translations.

One of the important questions, which needs to be asked here is : Is there any difference between a self-translation and a translation proper? According to Popovič, although the work is both composed and translated by the same person, self-translation “cannot be regarded as a variant of the original text but as a true translation” (qtd. in Montini 306). However, some of the translation scholars make a distinction between a self-translation and a translation proper. For example, Koller distinguishes between what he defines “autotranslation” and “true” translation because of the difference in the issue of *faithfulness*, “as the author-translator will feel justified in introducing changes into the text where an “ordinary” translator might hesitate to do so” (qtd. in Montini 306). Thus, faithfulness and alterations are certain characteristics which may distinguish a self-translation from a translation proper in the first place.

When self-translations of Beckett's works are examined, it is observed that unlike translations produced by ordinary translators, who usually try to produce an equivalent of the source text, Beckett's self-translations are the variations or extensions of the original texts. In other words, there are alterations in most of the target texts Beckett have produced. For example Cohn discusses the deletions, insertions and alterations in the translation of *Murphy*, *En Attendant Godot* (*Waiting for the Godot*), *Fin de Partie* (*Endgame*), and *Trilogy*. In Cohn's article, the comparative analysis of the original and self-translated works of Beckett revealed additions of meaning, and change of style. According to Cohn, for example, although "none of the changes is fundamental or extensive" (615) in the translation of *Murphy*, and although "by and large, the translation follows the original, of which, obviously, no one could have more intimate knowledge than its author-translator" (616), "eight years and a war intervened between original and translation, as a result of which, or at least after which, Beckett changed his language, both literally and figuratively" (616). Fitch also explains the reason for bold shifts produced by author-translators and their acceptance by the public as "the writer-translator is no doubt felt to have been in a better position to recapture the intentions of the author of the original than any ordinary translator" (125). Thus, the author-translator can translate more freely when compared with an ordinary translator. Thus, Beckett exercises his privilege as an author-translator by adding certain content or deleting certain features in his self-translations. This freedom enjoyed by the author-translator is usually a taboo for an ordinary translator.

Another reason for the alterations in the self-translations of Beckett is the notion of authority. An author of a text is assumed to have an authority over the text, while translators are assumed not to have any according to the conventional theories on translations. The question of authority for ordinary translators is also a matter of discussion which can be a subject of another paper. But the question of authority for self-translators is important for this study. Beckett, as an author-translator, has been invested with a unique authority over his self-translations by his readers. According to Fitch, "readers tend

to consider a translation done by the writer himself as closer to the original, more authorial and, consequently, more authorized (19). That is why self-translation is seen as “a double writing process more than a two-stage reading-writing activity, they seem to give less precedence to the original, whose authority is no longer a matter of ‘status and standing’ but becomes ‘temporal in character’ (Fitch 131).

In self-translation it is difficult to distinguish between the author and the translator: “here the translator is the author, the translation is an original, the foreign is the domestic and vice versa” (qtd. in Montini 308). This causes a blurred distinction between the original and the translation. According to Ana Helena Souza, this blurred distinction can be observed even in the works of the critics:

In Beckett’s case, even some of his critics tended to overlook differences between the two texts: they studied and quoted either the English or the French text, depending on the language they were writing in. That is to say that one or the other text was, and sometimes still is, treated as the “original” and, in some cases, there is not even the slightest mention to its pair in the other language. (Souza 48)

Thus, readers and even critics “view the translation done by the author himself as the most authorized substitute of the original; often as another original” (Souza 48).

Despite the fact that one cannot distinguish the “original” from the translations, translations still depend on the “originals” to survive. What is unique in self-translations is the fact that the “original” also needs the translation in order to survive. Souza explains this phenomenon as a “loss of autonomy” since two texts are “intrinsically connected” (50). Thus, a Turkish translator of Beckett’s works, I believe, should keep in mind this phenomenon of “loss of autonomy” during the translation process.

After a brief research on the different versions of Beckett's works and translations in the database of Turkish National Library³, I've found that there are 73 entries for Samuel Beckett. Some of them are articles, thesis, and research books, while some of them are visual materials related to Beckett's theatre plays performed in Turkey. According to this, 41 texts among 73 are Turkish translations of Samuel Beckett's works. These were translated into Turkish between the years 1959 and 2013. Three different examples are selected on purpose to reach some conclusions.

For example, *Molloy*, which was written in 1951, was translated by Bertan Onaran in 1962, and later on, in 1988, although the translator was the same, the translation of the same work was published by a different publishing house. *Malone Meurt*, and *L'Innommable* were translated singly by different translators by using the French source text, but published by the same publishing house respectively in 1989 and 1992. It is not until 2011 that Uğur Ün translated three of them by using both the French source text and the English self-translated version.

Another example is on *Fin de Partie*, which was written in French in 1957, and was translated by Beckett himself into English as *Endgame* in 1958. There are different editions for Turkish translations in the database. The earliest version, inherent in the Turkish National Library, was translated as *Sonu* by Berent Enç and Herman Sariyan in 1959. The second version was translated by Abet Limnn in 1993. The last edition was translated by Genco Erkal before the performance of the play in Turkey, and published in 2007. In Genco Erkal's translation in 2007, there is a brief note indicating the English and the French titles of the play, which reminds us of the fact that both versions have been studied during the translation process.

Last example is on *En Attendant Godot*, which was written in French in 1952. The play was translated by Beckett himself into

3 All these figures must be considered approximate, if only because of gaps and inconsistencies in the collection of the Turkish National Library Bibliography.

English in 1953. After excluding the reprints, it is seen that eight different editions of the translation of *En Attendant Godot* published by different publishing houses and translated by different translators including Ferit Edgü, Berent Enç, Hasan Anamur, Tuncay Birkan, Uđur Ün, and Tarık Günersel are available according to the Turkish National Library database. For example, Hasan Anamur translated the play using the French source text in 1990, while Tuncay Birkan translated the play from its English version in 1992, and added a long preface. Uđur Ün and Tarık Günersel translated the play in 2000 by using both English and French versions.

Tuncay Birkan, in his preface (5-8), explains the need for a different translation of the play, and says that there are certain differences between two Turkish translations, since the earlier version was translated from French. He acknowledges the fact that Beckett has added and deleted certain features, which makes the TT different, when the source language changes.

Examining all 41 editions in the Turkish National Library database, it can be deduced that some of these texts were translated from either the first (“original”) version or the second (self-translated) version almost until 1995. After this date, almost all of the translations were created by using the two versions of the works. However, it is important to note that the translator is usually the same in these translations, while publishing houses differ. Uđur Ün, the translator of Beckett in these editions, usually adds a brief translator’s note to his translation that justify the choice of a certain version, showing that the translator in question was aware of Beckett’s bilingual poetics, and both versions were consulted during the translation process.

As to conclude, one can say that self-translations are different from ordinary translations because of the alterations inherent in target text, notion of fidelity, notion of authority and the blurred boundary between the original and the translation. Thus, there are alterations in Beckett’s self-translated versions. Prefaces, in the Turkish versions, indicate that there seems to be an awareness among the Turkish translators of Beckett’s work especially after the 1990s,

although both versions were not used until 1994. After 1994, both the original and the self-translated versions were studied during the translation process. Thus, it can be concluded that one can talk about two different languages and two different processes while examining Beckett's works. The self-translation processes have, no doubt, contributed to his style. Thus, translators translating Beckett's work into a third language should be aware of the existence of both texts and consult them while working.

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