

Plays in Translation on the London Stage: visibility, celebrity, agency and collaboration

Geraldine Brodie

University College London, U.K.

g.brodie(a)ucl.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The theatrical practice of prominently attaching a well-known theatre practitioner's name to a staged playtext, which may have been composed using an expert's literal translation, raises issues of visibility and agency in translation theory. How does the 'celebrity' translator contribute to the eventual performance and the collaborative process of production? This thesis conducts an empirical study on a time-based sample of eight translated plays performed on the mainstream London stage during a three-month period in 2005. The sample comprises direct, indirect and literal translators from a variety of professional backgrounds, and the plays range from Ancient Greek to contemporary Danish. Methodologies include archival investigations and oral histories.

Firstly, I scrutinise the physical and economic contexts of the productions, analysing the sites of commission and performance, including a review of funding and management practices. Secondly, I examine the translation procedures of the eight plays, the collaboration of the translation and theatre practitioners and the relation of the translated playtext to the source-language play and earlier translations, where relevant. I consider the terminology presented to the prospective audience as translation, version or adaptation, and review reception. Thirdly, based on my interview research, I discuss the approaches adopted by the practitioners involved in the translation project, from inception to public performance, including producers, directors, literary managers, translators and writers. Finally, I interrogate issues of celebrity and collaboration in two case studies: Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* in an indirect translation by David Hare, and Euripides' *Hecuba* in a direct translation by Tony Harrison. I conclude that investigation of the wider aspects of theatre translation results in a re-evaluation of visibility issues. Studying the power-lines of theatrical networks reveals the multiplicity of voices among the agents collaborating in performance, where celebrity is only one of the contextual factors contributing to a staged translation.

KEYWORDS: direct translator, indirect translator, literal translator, performance, role of translator, theatre translation.

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