

20th Century Lipogrammatic Novels and their Translations

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ABSTRACT

A lipogram is a text that is written without the use of one or several letters of the alphabet, which means that words that contain the “forbidden” letter(s) are avoided. This formal constraint implies a strong link between source text and source language. Furthermore, the lipogrammatic form supports the content of such texts, and an inseparable connection between form and content makes both aspects equally important. These characteristics of lipograms provide the translator with specific problems. In Translation Studies, it is often suggested that in such cases the limits of translatability are reached. The translator has to take decisions, evaluate the importance of the individual aspects of individual ST items and try to render as much as possible. However, while fidelity to the ST seems important, the target culture and the target readers’ expectations cannot be ignored either. This study investigates the stylistic implications of this formal constraint and the possibilities and limitations of translating lipogrammatic prose. Parallels are drawn between the process of writing a lipogram and the process of translation in general, and the translatability of such texts is discussed with the help of different Translation Studies viewpoints, including intralingual translation, translatability (with considerations of the target polysystem, the difference between translation and adaptation as well as different translation strategies and their impact on fidelity) and hermeneutic considerations in translation. The corpus of lipograms since the 20th century in the languages English, French and German includes two French originals and their German and English translations, one untranslated German novel and two English works, one of which has been translated into German. Although extensive literature can be found about George Perec’s *La disparition*, the analyses of its translations that have been conducted are relatively selective and of limited value for Translation Studies purposes. Moreover, other lipograms have not been studied and considered yet to create a broader picture of the implications of this very particular form in literature.

KEYWORDS: adaptation, lipogram, literary translation, OULIPO, translatability

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