

**Jorge Braga Riera (2024). *Theatre is different: la traducción de la experiencia dramática*. Madrid: Guillermo Escolar Editor (Babélica), pp. 273, 17,10€. ISBN 978-84-19782-79-3.**

I have had the honour of being one of the first people to read this book and the first thing that struck me is the title itself, in which we can read ‘the translation of dramatic experience.’ I firmly believe that the title is a great choice, because it certainly helps the reader to understand from the very first moment the peculiarities of dramatic texts and, consequently, the scope of what the translation of such texts – or rather the translation of dramatic experiences – implies.

Much has been written about the translation of fiction and poetry. Thus, we can find monographs, manuals and articles that develop theories from both general and more specific perspectives, based on particular difficulties in the translation literary works. Within the vast theoretical corpus on the different problems of this specific type of translation, since the end of the twentieth century there has been an increase in interest in addressing the problems of theatre translation, as evidenced, for instance, by Susan Bassnett's texts on the subject, such as: “The Problems of Translating Theatre Texts” (1981), “Ways through the Labyrinth: Strategies and Methods for Translating Theatre Texts” (1985), “Translating for the Theatre: Textual Complexities” (1990) and “Still Trapped in the Labyrinth: Further Reflections on Translation and Theatre” (1998), in which the difficulty of translating theatre texts is addressed.

In the introduction to the book edited in 2004 by Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Holger M. Klein, we can see a certain evolution in the theoretical study of dramatic translation. It already pointed to the existence of two traditions when dealing with this type of texts: the one centred on the text, called ‘reader-oriented’ tradition, and the ‘stage-oriented’ tradition, in which the performance of the play is a primordial aspect to take into account in the translation process. In the Spanish context, three years later, in 2007, Pilar Ezpeleta, in her book *Teatro y Traducción: aproximación desde la obra de Shakespeare*, clearly positioned herself in the stage-oriented tradition and to a large extent based the development of her work on theatrical concepts, which was a great step forward at the time. In 2016, Alejandro López Lapeña published *A pie de escenario. Guía de la traducción teatral*, which was undoubtedly an essential guide to understand the scope of dramatic translation. In this book, the author first studies the components of theatre, and then focuses on theatrical translation and its main challenges, clearly developing essential concepts, such as orality, immediacy and representability, among others. In *Theater Translation. Theory and Practice*, Massimiliano Morini (2022) also summarises the evolution discussed here from the consideration of theatrical texts as texts to the current opinion that the position of the translator of theatre should clearly be that favouring its representation.

The book that concerns us here, *Theatre is different: la traducción de la experiencia dramática* by Jorge Braga Riera, is undoubtedly a key and essential reading for anyone who wants to face for the first time the hard task of translating dramatic texts – or ‘dramatic experiences,’ as we read in the title. In fact, we might say that this is one of the few studies that abandons the reader-oriented versus stage-oriented dichotomy. One detail that makes the book immensely pleasurable to read is the fact that each chapter is preceded by a quotation that is intimately related to the theme or subject that the chapter develops. This undoubtedly shows the affection that the author has for the particular works quoted and, as a consequence, for the task of translating ‘dramatic experiences.’

The preface alone will enable many readers to understand the perspective that the author develops in his book. Of vital interest, in my opinion, is the kind of ‘decatalogue’ that the author includes as a starting point, summarising all the elements that the translator must take into account in the translation process. Of all the elements discussed, perhaps the most important is that of the multidimensional nature of theatre. In the introduction which follows the preface, Jorge Braga justifies the reasons why it is necessary to have many more studies of dramatic translation –among them, the book reviewed here.

In chapter one, Jorge Braga outlines the singularity and the different specificities of theatrical translation, including its various phases and distinctive elements such as the aforementioned orality and representability, among others. The section on the issue of terminology –the difference between ‘translation’, ‘adaptation’ and ‘version’– is very interesting. Undoubtedly, the most timely section is the one dedicated to the human agents involved in theatrical translation, among which the author includes the following: the author of the play; a literal translator (very common in British theatrical spaces); a direct translator, who could well be the stage director; the playwright; the director; actors and the audience. All these human agents are partakers of this final product, which is not merely the translation of a text, but the representation of a dramatic experience.

Chapter two develops one of the essential elements to consider in theatre translation, which is none other than interculturality, since the translated cultural product will be received in different ways depending on the decisions taken in the process of translation and staging. To illustrate the consequences of neutralising strategies in translation, or the use of foreignisation and domestication procedures, Jorge Braga explains various and varied real examples in which, for different reasons, the result may not have been what the audience expected.

Chapter three is devoted to the translation of humour in theatre. As the author points out, humour in the performing arts needs special attention because of all the aspects involved in its creation, from semiotics to linguistics, which makes transfer in this type of works more complex than in the translation of fiction, for example. In theatre, humorous devices must be transferred in a clear way, without the help of footnotes, but potentially aided by the use of non-verbal mechanisms,

such as facial or body gestures. This chapter is of great interest because of the number and variety of illustrative examples included, which show different and more or less creative solutions to solve this translation problem.

In chapter four, the reader is introduced to one of the innate characteristics of theatre translation: orality. The immediacy of theatre is undoubtedly one of the challenges facing the translator. Jorge Braga skilfully summarises the results of different studies carried out on orality in theatre and does not forget that this aspect is subject, as it cannot be otherwise, to the indications of the director and to the performance of the actors and actresses. Again, in this chapter, the author illustrates us with examples taken from plays in English and with proposed translations into Spanish, all accompanied by a more than pertinent analysis.

Along with orality, another challenging aspect of the translation of dramatic texts is the translation of social and geographical language varieties, tackled in chapter five. The theatrical genre is probably the one with the greatest capacity to explore the possibilities offered by dialects and accents, as stated by the author (123). The problem with the translation of dialects and accents is precisely that, given the absence of equivalence in the target culture, there are many solutions, and perhaps none of them good. Again, the author stresses that some of the solutions come from the hand of the directors who, in the process of editing the play, can benefit from the dialectal variety of a particular actor. In this chapter we can also see some examples that illustrate the different options available.

Chapter six develops one of the topics that I personally find most fascinating in the translation of dramatic texts, namely the translation of the proper names of the characters on stage. In this case, as we read in the chapter, different aspects such as phonological, semantic, ethno-linguistic (social and cultural) features must be taken into account. To illustrate this, the author proposes different mechanisms which he analyses and exemplifies with fragments from two plays.

We could say that chapter seven deals with the implications of taking into account as intrinsic features of dramatic texts all the aspects mentioned above, such as orality, immediacy, translation of dialects and of cultural aspects, and none other than retranslation. This is a very interesting issue, since we live in a world of constant changes in language and in cultural paradigms, which means that some expressions may become not only outdated but also incorrect from a political and ideological point of view. Once again, the author ends the chapter with an exhaustive analysis, in this case a comparative analysis of two translations of the same text.

Chapter eight is devoted to highlighting the importance of studies, such as the one that is being reviewed, on the translation of dramatic texts. An interesting section in this chapter is the one entitled 'Methodology of theatre research,' in which the author proposes different models such as comparative analysis, contextual analysis and production analysis.

In the last chapter, chapter nine, we find something that seems essential and absolutely necessary to me in this type of study: a window into the world of stage direction. From the beginning of the book, Jorge Braga Riera repeatedly links the translation of dramatic texts with staging, and so the author includes in chapter nine an interview with two important Spanish stage directors, Ana Contreras and Tamzin Townsend. I found this end for the book extremely enriching and complementary to the task of translation. This, again, brings us back to the title – to the translation of ‘dramatic experiences.’ Without a doubt, this volume is an essential text for understanding the specific characteristics of this type of translation, which still needs much more work.

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