

Titles and translation

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In der Praxis der Titelübersetzung scheint das Verfassen von zielsprachlichen Titeln den Vorrang zu haben, die in der Zielkultur bestimmte Funktionen erfüllen – oft auf Kosten der Formulierung des semantischen Inhalts des ausgangssprachlichen Titels. Da jeder Titel in gewissem Maße die Art und Weise bestimmt, wie der Benutzer an das Kulturprodukt (Roman, Film usw.) herangeht und es auslegt, sind die gegenwärtigen Übersetzungstendenzen oft für Erwartungen und Auslegungen in der Zielkultur verantwortlich, die sich von denjenigen der Ausgangskultur deutlich unterscheiden.

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1 How to do things with titles

Half a century ago John Austin (1962) exhaustively explained how we *do things* with words. We also do things with titles. Titles are devised for the purpose of doing things or, better, for the purpose of performing functions. Investigating functions to be performed by titles or through titles is one of the lines of research of *titrologie*, a discipline whose origins may be traced back to the early 1970s when its foundations were laid by Grivel (1973a, 1973b), Duchet (1973) and Hoek (1973).

Title functions may be divided into *essential* and *optional* (cf. Nord 1995). The essential functions are performed by default by every title. *Saturday*, for example, is the title of a novel by Ian McEwan. It is the novel's *name* (cf. Genette 1987): the title performs a *naming* function with regard to the cultural product to which it refers (Grivel (1973a) and Hoek (1981) call this function *appellative*). *Saturday* is the name of the novel and the novel can only be designated by that name (cf. Hoek 1973). It can, of course, be referred to by using phrases such as “the novel McEwan published in 2005” or “the novel McEwan wrote just after *Atonement*”, but it cannot be designated by “titles” such as *The Seventh Day of the Week* or *The Day Before Sunday* (cf. Bosredon & Tamba 1995). The naming function is not the only essential function performed by titles: “while titles are names, they are a good deal more than just names. [...] They are names

for a purpose, but not merely for the purpose of identification and designation” (Fisher 1984: 288). Whoever is asked a question such as “have you read McEwan’s *Saturday*?” or reads a reference to something called *Saturday* immediately learns that there is a cultural product entitled *Saturday*. The title, therefore, performs an *informative* function (the informative function partially coincides with the function Nord (1990) calls *metatextual*). Furthermore, when the word *Saturday* is read or heard and recognised as a title – thanks to the context of utterance or on account of typographic conventions (titles are written in italics or in quotation marks) – some kind of contact is established between that word (that title) and whoever hears it or reads it: the title therefore performs a *phatic* function (cf. Nord 1990). The naming, informative and phatic functions are performed by each and every title for the very fact that it exists and is used in a communicative situation: every title is the name of a cultural product; every title informs about the existence of a cultural product bearing that name; every title establishes a contact with the potential user (reader, viewer etc.). Paradoxically, this is also true for cultural products that are deliberately left untitled by their authors (it is not uncommon in music and the visual arts) and end up being titled *Untitled* (cf. Symes 1992; Viridis Limentani 1992).

Titles may also be used to perform other functions. For example a title may be used to distinguish a cultural product from any other cultural product: a title, therefore, may perform a *distinctive* function (cf. Nord 1990). Apart from being a legal requirement in some countries (France, for example, cf. Malingret 1998), differentiating product from product would seem obvious when choosing a title for something to be placed on the market (cf. Symes 1992). Yet, this is not always the case: no fewer than three films entitled *La vita è bella* were released in Italy from 1943 to 1997, and a quick look at any online bookshop will be enough to discover quite a number of books called *My Life*.

A title may be used to say something about the cultural product, to refer to its content or to some of its aspects: the title may therefore perform a *descriptive* function (this function is called *designative* by Grivel (1973a) whereas Nord (1990, 1995) calls it *informative* or *referential*, but also *descriptive*). A title such as *Saturday* seems to allude to the fact that the novel is about a particular day or about events taking place on a

Saturday, which happens to be true. *Saturday* may therefore be said to perform, at least to some extent, a descriptive function. Some kind of descriptive function is similarly performed by eponymous titles, i.e. titles identifying a text with the name of its protagonist, such as *Lolita* or *Hedda Gabler* (cf. Lahlou 1989), or by titles mentioning objects or places playing an important role in the novel or film, such as *The Lighthouse* or *The Yellow Wallpaper*. More explicit in describing content are titles making direct reference to the events narrated in the novel or film, such as *The Great Train Robbery* or *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Titles clearly stating what or whom their cultural products are about are called *neutral* by Levinson: “titles whose selection seems almost automatic” (Levinson 1985: 34). However, in contrast with titles of scientific publications whose goal is to inform and to inform quickly about the content (cf. Haggan 2004), providing information about the product is not a priority for titles of films and literary works (cf. Malingret 1998). That is why fiction titles cover a range going from totally transparent (see the neutral titles above) to partially transparent (e.g. *The Invisible Man*) to metaphorical (e.g. *The Waste Land*) to opaque (e.g. *Il nome della rosa / The Name of the Rose*) (cf. Baicchi 2004).¹ Furthermore, transparent titles may turn out to be *undermining* or *opposing* (Levinson 1985), in that they contradict the content of their products, e.g. Flannery O’Connor’s *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (Genette (1987) describes titles of this kind as *ironic* or *antiphrastic*); or they may even be *mystifying* or *disorienting* as they “seem completely *tangential* or *orthogonal*” to the text (Levinson 1985: 36), e.g. Boris Vian’s *L’Automne à Pékin / Autumn in Peking*, a novel that has nothing to do with either Autumn or Beijing. Without reaching such extremes, even “proper” neutral titles can to some extent be misleading. As noted by Umberto Eco (1985: 7), “*Père Goriot* focuses the attention on the figure of the old father, though the novel is also the story of Rastignac; or of Vautrin, alias Collin [and] it is clear that *The Three Musketeers* is, in reality, the tale of the fourth”. Titles should therefore be handled with care as they may be untrustworthy and deceptive (cf. Roy 2008).

¹ It is interesting to note that before opting for an opaque title such as *Il nome della rosa*, Eco had considered and discarded two neutral (and descriptive) titles such as *L’abbazia del delitto* [= *The crime’s abbey*] (i.e. the novel’s location) and *Adso da Melk* [= *Adso from Melk*] (i.e. the name of the protagonist/narrator) (Folena 1992: 4).

A title may allude to other texts or other titles: it may therefore perform an *intertextual* and/or an *intertitular* function (cf. Hoek 1981). As pointed out by Nord (1995: 281), “like other texts, titles form part of the text corpus of a culture community with which they are linked by intertextual relations: they quote other texts (and titles), and are quoted in turn”, e.g. Agatha Christie’s *Hickory Dickory Dock* is a title taken from a nursery rhyme, and Joyce’s *Ulysses* alludes to Homer’s *Odyssey* (*allusive* is the word used by Levinson (1985) to refer to titles performing an intertextual / intertitular function). Intertextuality / intertitularity may also be a feature of an individual author’s production, e.g. Jerome K. Jerome’s *Three Men on the Bummel* coming a few years after, and referring to, *Three Men in a Boat*, or Sue Grafton’s *alphabet series* where all titles have the same form: *A Is for Alibi*; *B Is for Burglar*; *C Is for Corpse* etc. As the choice of titles is influenced or even determined by the “library of the time” and by the social discourse of the time (cf. Hoek 1981), cultural products are often given titles that entertain a harmonious relationship with other titles of the same period (cf. Malingret 1998), i.e. “fashionable” titles echoing other titles.²

A title may provide a key to the interpretation of the cultural product: “titles are names which function as guides to interpretation” (Fisher 1984: 288). The title may therefore perform a *suggestive* function (cf. Viezzi 2004). The title inevitably affects the way in which users approach a cultural product: “interpretation begins with the title, which is the seed that contains the tree”, says Maiorino (2008: 2); and, confronted with Genette’s (1987) apparently otiose question about how Joyce’s *Ulysses* would be read if it were not entitled *Ulysses*, Maiorino himself (2008: 67) replies by asking how *Ulysses* should be read *just because* it is entitled *Ulysses*. With its ability to communicate with the users, draw their attention and shape their attitude, a title should be regarded as an integral part of the cultural product. Any change in the title will therefore necessarily change the product itself and its perception and interpretation:

² In Italy, for example, many recent fiction titles address the reader directly by using second-person pronouns or second-person verb forms (cf. Parrella 2013) and a surprisingly large number of titles contain the word *profumo* [= perfume] or the word *proibito* [= forbidden] (Marietti 2011).

whether the head painted in 1905 by Henri Matisse is called *Madame Matisse*, as it sometimes is, or *The Green Line*, as it perhaps more often is, alters the meaning of the work in a significant way. As *Madame Matisse*, it is a portrait, suggestive of, if not representative of, her features. As *The Green Line*, it is a purely fauvistic abstraction with crucial emphasis upon color. (Fisher 1984: 292)

Irrespective of their cultural or artistic value as literary works, films etc., cultural products are, indeed, *products*; they are meant for the market: “novels have always been commodities as well as works of art, and commercial considerations can affect titles, or cause them to be changed” (Lodge 1994: 195). The members of the Belgian Groupe μ (1970) even say that the real author of film titles is the market. Hence another fundamental function titles may perform, the *seductive* function, i.e. the function aiming at raising the potential users’ interest and inducing them to buy the book, go to the cinema etc. (*advertising* (Grivel 1973a), *operative* or *appellative* (Nord (1990, 1994, 1995), *commercial* or *seductive* (Pascua Febles 1994), *seductive* (Genette 1987) are the different ways in which different authors refer to this function).³ In a way, all the optional functions discussed so far have some seductive potential, but other tools can be used, and indeed are often used, to fulfil a seductive function and attract the potential user: a reference to sex or to crime and violence or to a famous character, or, paradoxically, a cryptic or incomprehensible title etc. It is easy to imagine how the choice of the title may become a bone of contention between product-oriented authors (or directors) and market-oriented publishers (or producers and distributors).

Further functions have been identified, such as the *poetic* function, fulfilled for example by a title such as *Pride and Prejudice* (cf. Weinrich 2001; Viezzi 2011), the *expressive* function, performed by expressing an opinion on or an evaluation of the product or some of its aspects (cf. Nord 1990, 1995), and others. Reasons of space, however, make it impossible to deal with them here. For a discussion of a very wide range of title functions, see Hoek (1981).

³ As is often the case, in *titrologie* and elsewhere, the same word is used by different authors to refer to different concepts and different words are used to refer to the same concept: Grivel’s and Hoek’s *appellative* function is not Nord’s *appellative* function (and Nord’s *informative* function is not the *informative* function described in this paper).

2 Doing (other) things with translated titles

The practice of fiction title translation is characterised by a variety of strategies ranging from “literal” translation, i.e. the accurate reformulation of the source title’s semantic content, to the creation of brand new target titles absolutely unrelated to their source titles. Some authors even reject the word “translation” when referring to the operation leading from a source title to a target title, and talk about *adaptation* (Jiménez Serrano 1997), *transposition* (Bucaria 2010) or *substitution* (Malingret 1998), a term recalling the title of a paper on the translation of names in *Astérix* (Embleton 1991). Substitution is indeed what takes place: one title is replaced by another, as noted by Levin (1977: xxxiv) with reference to Emily Brontë’s classic: “the awesome proper name in *Wuthering Heights* found a substitute which conveys both its atmosphere and its onomatopoeia, *Les Hauts de Hurlevent*”.

While the reluctance to assign translational status to the relationship between a source title and a target title may to some extent be justified, it should also be noted that source and target titles are *necessarily* related. They are the names of the *same* book or film etc. in different languages; within a catalogue of titles such as a dictionary of films or a dictionary of literary works, one title *necessarily* corresponds to the other: irrespective of the semantic relationship between the two, they may therefore be said to be *mutual intertranslations* (cf. Wilson 1978).

Irrespective of the word used – “translation” or any other – the fact remains that source and target titles are often semantically unrelated and the reason lies in the very nature of titles. When translating a title, consideration is given to functions to be performed in another market and in another linguaculture. Translating a title, therefore, means *choosing* a title for a translated product: it is a form of creation, a form of re-writing, and the translated title is different because the conditions and intentions of its creation and reception are different (cf. Malingret 1998). In all this, reformulation or reproduction of meaning is definitely not a priority (cf. Nord 1990).

According to Symes (1992), titles look both inwards, i.e. to the cultural product, and outwards, i.e. to the market and the potential users. The choice of a *new* title affects both dimensions and is not without consequences as to the way in which users approach, perceive and interpret the cultural product.

Target titles may *change* source titles in a number of significant ways. They may present a different point of view, e.g. Agatha Christie's *The Third Girl* was translated into Italian as *Sono un'assassina?* [= Am I a killer?], the external, neutral point of view being replaced by a first-person question. They may highlight a different aspect or character, e.g. *Män som hatar kvinnor* [= Men who hate women], the first book in Stieg Larsson's *Millennium trilogy*, was published in English with the title *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*: while the former draws the readers' attention to *men*, the latter focuses on a *girl*. Translated titles may be more explicit, e.g. Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* was published in France under the title *L'Enfant volé* [= The stolen child]: a source title that might be classified somewhere between the metaphoric and the opaque is replaced by a target title that is definitely more explicit since the novel is about the abduction of a little girl.⁴

Target titles may add genre information, e.g. John Le Carré's *The Night Manager* becomes *El infiltrado* [= The undercover agent] in the Spanish translation, clearly indicating that the novel is a spy story: according to Nord (1994: 64), "information about the genre which in the source culture is given by the author's name is shifted to the title in the target-language formulation"; clearly, this strategy is also used for authors who would not appear to need it. Translated titles may offer a different perspective or a different key to the interpretation of the novel or film, e.g. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *La soledad del manager* [= The executive's loneliness] is *The Angst-Ridden Executive* in the English translation: in terms of (suggested) character analysis the two titles seem to guide the readers in different directions; and P.D. James's *An Unsuitable*

⁴ On a previous occasion (Viezzi 2011), the suggestion was put forward that the *explicitation hypothesis* (Séguinot 1988) might be proven true in title translation. Research on this topic is still under way and it is impossible at this stage to confirm or deny the hypothesis. However, it is certainly not unusual to see target titles that are more explicit than their source titles.

Job for a Woman was first translated into Italian as *Un lavoro inconsueto per una donna* [= An unusual job for a woman]: as is obvious, unusual jobs are not necessarily unsuitable jobs – the two titles are definitely different and appear to invite the readers to look at the job in question in two different ways.

Target titles may suggest a moral or a lesson to be learned, e.g. Dennis Lehane's *Mystic River* became *La morte non dimentica* [= Death does not forget] in the Italian translation; they may add the name of a (famous) character, probably as a way to attract the reader, e.g. Agatha Christie's *Caribbean Mystery* was published in Italy with the title *Miss Marple nei Caraibi* [= Miss Marple in the Caribbean]; they may contain intertextual / intertitular references, e.g. *Cuatro mujeres y un destino* [= Four women and one destiny], the Spanish title of the American film *Bad Girls*, alludes to *Dos hombres y un destino* [= Two men and one destiny], the Spanish title of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*: the (unjustified) allusion may be regarded as a way to hook the potential viewer (cf. Fuentes Luque 1997–98). Translated titles may emphasise the seductive aspect resorting to the usual tools, e.g. the American film *Coach* was distributed in Italy with the title *L'allenatrice sexy* [= The sexy coach], the British film *Reptile* was released in Italy as *La morte arriva strisciando* [= Death comes crawling] etc.

Target titles may differ in semantic content from one target language to another, e.g. John Grisham's *The Chamber* is *Cámara de gas* [= Gas chamber] in Spanish, *Le Couloir de la mort* [= Death row] in French, *Het vonnis* [= The sentence] in Dutch and *L'appello* [= The appeal] in Italian; or even within the same language, e.g. *Some Like It Hot* was *Algunos prefieren quemarse* [= Some prefer to get burnt] in Cuba and *Con faldas y a lo loco* [= Wearing skirts and running mad] in Spain. Significant changes indeed, with obvious consequences in terms of what is said to the potential user about the product and for what purpose.

It is not unusual for novels to be re-translated, and a new translation is generally given a new title, with all this may entail. For example, Italo Svevo's *Senilità* [= Old age] was first published in English with the title *As a Man Grows Older* and then with the title *Emilio's Carnival*. As is obvious, "carnival" is not a concept normally associated with

old age: the expectations prompted by the two titles are completely different as are the suggestions or the keys to the interpretation of the novel provided to the readers. In a way, the new title would seem to be the outcome of careful reflection about the novel and its meaning. A further example: Dostoyevsky's *Бесы* is known in the English-speaking world with no less than three different titles – *The Possessed*, *The Devils* and *Demons* – each of which apparently being the result of a thorough analysis of the novel and suggesting a different way to look at it or read it. In many or even most cases, though, the choice of the new title does not seem to stem from a new critical evaluation, but rather from seductive/commercial considerations.

Different titles for the same product in the same language are not just the result of translation (or perhaps they could be regarded as examples of *intralingual* translation) and they may be due to a variety of reasons, e.g. Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* was published in the United States as *Murder in the Calais Coach*, probably to avoid any confusion with Graham Greene's *Orient Express* that had been published a couple of years earlier (interestingly enough, the UK edition of Greene's novel was entitled *Stamboul Train*); David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* was published in the United States as *Souls and Bodies* "on the grounds that the British title would be shelved by American bookshops under How To Do It books" (Lodge 1994: 195); the first book in the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, had its title changed into *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* for the American market, sorcerers probably being regarded as more seductive than philosophers; etc.

To conclude, whether across languages or within the same language, whether for a different market or for the same market, titles are changed or substituted with amazing ease with an inevitable impact on the way in which readers or viewers relate to a novel or a film and, as has been said, with an inevitable impact on the novel or the film. To some extent, a novel (or a film) with a "different" title is a "different" novel (or film). They may be unaware of it, but those who are in charge of translating a title have a serious responsibility not only towards the readers (or viewers) but also towards the authors, and their role is by no means negligible or irrelevant. Lefevere and Bassnett

(1990: 11) said that “translation, like all re-writings, is never innocent”. There are good reasons to believe that title translation is not innocent either.

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