Shaping reception: The sociocultural role of paratexts in translation

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Abstract

This review paper explores the multifarious phenomenon of translation from a paratextual perspective as developed by Gérard Genette (1987). Through examining the various aspects of paratexts and providing more insights into the peritextual as well as the epitextual constituents that shape the translated works, the present study seeks to reveal the interplay between the source text and its translation(s) in addition to shedding light on the sociocultural contexts in which these translations are produced and received by the target audience. Furthermore, the paper scrutinizes how paratextual elements operate as sociocultural mediators that are capable of shaping the target readers' perception and interpretation of their sociocultural surroundings. Through investigating the dynamic relationship between the translated texts and their paratexts, the study at hand aims to highlight how paratexts can be utilized not only as an effective tool for analyzing the ideological and sociocultural underpinnings of the translated products, but also as an instrument for evaluating the sociocultural impact on the reception and visibility of the target texts across different times, and hence foregrounding that the paratextual elements are as essentials as the textual ones in understanding the translation process.

Keywords: Paratexts; translation; target readers; paratranslation; sociocultural context; ideology

تشكيل الفهم: الدور الاجتماعي والثقافي للنصوص الموازية في الترجمة

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية مراجعة ظاهرة الترجمة من منظور النصوص الموازية (paratexts) كما طوّرها جيرارد جينيت (١٩٨٧). فمن خلال دراسة الجوانب المختلفة للنصوص الموازية وتقديم رؤى أعمق حول العناصر الداخلية (peritextual) والخارجية (epitextual) التي تشكّل الأعمال المترجمة، تسعى الدراسة الحالية إلى الكشف عن التفاعل بين النص المصدر وترجماته بالإضافة إلى تسليط الضوء على السياقات الاجتماعية والثقافية التي يتم إنتاج هذه الترجمات من خلالها واستقبالها من قبل الجمهور المستهدف. علاوة على ذلك، تفحص الدراسة الحالية كيف تعمل العناصر النصية المحيطة كوسائط اجتماعية وثقافية قادرة على تشكيل تصورات القراء المستهدفين وتفسيرهم لبيئتهم الاجتماعية والثقافية المحيطة. من خلال دراسة العلاقة الديناميكية بين النصوص المترجمة ونصوصها الموازية، تهدف هذه الدراسة نحو تسليط الضوء على كيفية استخدام النصوص الموازية ليس فقط كأداة فعالة لتحليل الأسس الاجتماعية الثقافية والأيديولوجية للنصوص المترجمة، ولكن أيضًا كأداة لتقييم التأثير الاجتماعي والثقافي على استقبال ورؤية النصوص المترجمة عبر الأزمنة المختلفة، وبالتالي إبراز أهمية العناصر الموازية مثلها مثل العناصر النصية في فهم عملية الترجمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النصوص الموازية؛ الترجمة؛ القراء المستهدفون؛ الترجمة الموازية؛ السياق الاجتماعي والثقافي؛ الإيديولوجية.

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Introduction

The concept of paratext was first coined by Gérard Genette, who defines the term as all the elements that enable the text to be a book and to be presented to the readers (Genette 1997). In his classic book entitled *Seuils* (1987) which was later translated into English as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), Genette further defines paratexts as a series of elements accompanying the text ranging from the cover page, author's name, preface, notes, font size, visual elements, layout and many others. He also identifies the paratext as an area existing between the text and off-text as an edge, fringe or an unidentified zone that is "not only of transition but also transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, an influence that [...] is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (Genette 1997, 2). In other words, paratexts can be defined as all those verbal as well as non-verbal constituents that may "frame" and "extend" a certain text (Deane-Cox 2011, 6). Moreover, Genette (1997) believes that "the text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions", and thus it is the function of paratexts to present the text in order to ensure its presence in the world (1).

Paratexts can be categorized into authorial and editorial paratexts. First, authorial paratexts refer to those texts that are produced by the author himself/ herself such as prefaces and chapter headings. Second, editorial paratexts includes the book cover design, titles, layout as well as the number of printed copies, which are mainly the publishers' responsibility (Genette 1997, 27). Under the broader concept of paratexts, Genette (1997) categorizes paratextual elements into two main categories, namely peritexts and the epitexts, which are thoroughly explained in the following sections:

Peritexts

The concept of peritext refers to all elements or components that are located within the written text ranging from the title, the preface, or any other elements that are "inserted into the interstices of the text", for instance specific notes or chapter titles (Genette 1997, 6-7). Similarly, Garrido (2011) defines the peritext as an *essentially spatial and material category* that is used to describe the items that actually exist in the work along the text such as titles, subtitles, prologues and epilogues and notes.

Epitexts

Epitexts refer to all the elements that lie *outside* the text; that is, those materials that are "not materially appended to the text within the same volume, but circulating […] a virtually limitless physical and social space" (Genette 1997, 344). Moreover, Genette's distinction can also feature "publishers, semiofficial allographic, public authorial, and private authorial" materials (Genette 1997, 345). In other words, "semiofficial allographic epitext" refers to those pieces of writing that are produced by a third party that has been approved or validated by the author. As for public authorial and private authorial epitexts, the former alludes to those materials such as interviews, conferences and self-commentaries, in which the author addresses the audience; while the latter indicates elements like pretexts (outlines, drafts, etc…), diary entries and correspondences (Deane-Cox 2014).

Translation studies and paratexts

A great part of the existing research on the translation of paratexts is mostly context-oriented (Batchelor 2018). This type of paratextual research is closely related to the various *turns* that have taken place in translation studies, particularly the cultural and sociological turns. Moreover, these shifts or *turns* in translation studies have paved the way for the emergence of several "theoretical frameworks" such as the postcolonial theory, Bourdieusian sociology, Gramscian notion of hegemony and Baker's narrative theory (Batchelor 2018, 35). All of these

Shaping reception: The sociocultural role of paratexts in translation
Dr. Yomna Aly & Prof. Riham Debian & Prof. Abeer M. Refky M. Seddeek

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

concepts and theories have been frequently applied to investigate the field of translation of paratexts.

With the advent of the 20th century, translation studies have developed and achieved great progress, where it has paved the way for one *turn* after another (Jixing 2012). According to Yan and Huang (2014), the development of turns in translation studies was a gradual process, in which the development started with the linguistic turn in translation. Moreover, the development of functions of translation over the years has played a significant role in the development of various turns in translation studies, ranging from the simple communicative function to the religious, political, ideological functions and many others (Yan and Huang 2014). The development of these various functions gave rise to various turns in translation studies, in which each turn represents a distinct approach towards translation studies. Among these is the cultural approach which has emanated in response to the linguistic turn and the notion of "equivalence" as the starting point for the theorization of translation (Marinetti 2011). The cultural turn marked a shift away from the "belief in finding universal standards for phenomena to a belief that phenomena are influenced (if not determined) by the observer" (Marinetti 2011, 26). In other words, the cultural paradigm has emerged to highlight the importance of not only the cultural role in translation, but also the social background, the influence that cultural tradition may impose on translation as well as the subjectivity of translators. According to Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), translation should be perceived within context owing to its existence as a product of a particular history and target culture. Hence, translation studies cannot be explained through the mapping of mere linguistic correspondence between languages according to universal standards (Marinetti 2011). From this perspective, the concept of translation rejects the view of culture as an "agency preserving static views of tradition and identity", and rather regards it as a process of "dynamic transformation resulting from continual confrontations of cultural formations" (Wolf 2007, 3-4).

Within the last two decades, the sociological turn in translation studies has also started to pave its way (Simeoni 2005). A sociological approach towards translation is treated as a "social activity" entailing various agents (for example, translators, critics, editors, authors, etc…) as well as institutions (such as publishing houses, translation schools, academic journals, professional organisations, etc…) (Sapiro 2014, 82). Moreover, such social activity is performed by these aforementioned agents based on their professional skills (whether technical, academic, linguistic, etc…) under specific conditions, for instance "material conditions" (i.e. whether there is a profit or not) and status (i.e. if it is a scholastic practice or a professional one) (Sapiro 2014, 82). According to Wolf (2007), any act of translation, whether it is an enactment or a product, is rooted within a social context. Since the translation practice is performed by individuals who exist within a particular social system, the translation process is thus embedded within social institutions which control the way translated works are selected, produced and distributed (Wolf 2007).

Hence, it seems that investigating the target text's faithfulness to the original text is no longer the main concern of translation studies as focus has shifted towards the social, cultural, communicative and ideological practices that could be involved in the translation process (El-dali 2022). According to Pym (2006), a sociocultural approach towards translation studies shifts the focus away from texts to translators, or more generally to 'mediators', dealing with questions such as "who is doing the mediating, for whom, within what networks, and with what social effects" (3). Hermans (1996) also states that the process of translation should be regarded as a "complex transaction taking place in a communicative, socio-cultural context" (26). In the same vein, Wolf (2007) confirms that "there is no benefit in encouraging the elaboration of separate analytical tools […] An emphasis on the relationship between culture and society would help to avoid dichotomization and allow us to transcend traditional deterministic views" (5-6). As a result, translation studies have frequently been incorporated into the paratextual apparatus owing to its capabilities

of exploring translated texts within their sociocultural context as Deane-Cox (2014) also argues that the paratextual apparatus can provide better insights into the creation process of translations, their marketing and how they would be perceived by the target audience According to Shamma (2015), not only do translators employ paratexts to engage with the target text(s), but also use it as a critical tool for self-reflection on the text(s).

Paratexts in translation studies: diverse approaches

Multiple researchers and scholars have explored the paratextual theory in a variety of ways, particularly when they are analyzed within the context of translation studies. From his perspective, Genette (1997) views translations as paratexts of the original text since they provide a sort of commentary or an interpretation of how the original text is supposed to be perceived by the target audience. Among the earliest contributions to the study of paratexts in translation studies is Hermans' and Kovala's two essays in *Target* journal (1996). In fact, Hermans and Kovala (1996) are one of the earliest scholars to engage Genette's perspective into translation studies as they both investigated how the paratextual constituents are capable of offering insights into the relationship between the target text and the original text. Furthermore, Hermans and Kovala (1996) invalidate Genette's notions of translation as a mere reproduction of the original text and highlight the active role of the translator within the translation process as they emphasize that paratextual elements are mere tools that the translator can utilize to render his interpretation and/ or adaptation of the original text, and hence impacting the way the translated text would be received by the target audience.

Following Hermans and Kovala (1996), several scholars, such as Tahir-Gürçağlar (2002), refute Genette's (1997) conception of translation as paratext whose sole function is to serve the original work irrespective of the target audience and she insists that such approach would limit the perception of translated texts as entirely independent texts. Even though Genette's view seem to align with the conventional perspective towards translation as a

faithful rendition of the original text, his approach implies a hierarchal relationship where the target text is placed in a subordinate position to the original text. Moreover, she stresses the importance of considering translations as individual entities in their own right, where paratexts function as mediators to reveal how these translated products are presented and received by the target audience (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2011). Hence, Tahir-Gürçağlar (2002) maintains that paratexts can well serve translations provided that these translations are considered as completely independent texts, in which paratexts are only viewed as "presentational material accompanying translated texts and text-specific meta discourses formed directly around them" (44).

In her critique of Tahir-Gürçağlar's interpretation of Genette's notion, Deane-Cox (2014) contends that Tahir-Gürçağlar has misinterpreted Genette's proposition that translations are to be considered in a subservient position to the original text since Genette's criteria were particularly determined by the involvement of the author within the process of translation. From her perspective, Deane-Cox (2014) also rejects the perception of translations as paratexts and refers to such approach as a limited one as there is often a persistent need to conserve a close connection between the original author and the translator. According to her, it can be noted that there seems to be no room for translation in Genette's paratextual model since the paradigm is rather focused on the author, the publisher and the "(semi) authorized third party" (Deane-Cox 2014, 28). Both Tahir-Gürçağlar and Deane-Cox's viewpoint seems to support the view of translations as independent texts having their own set of paratextual elements.

According to Deane-Cox (2014), adopting a paratextual paradigm can also significantly contribute to the analysis of translations through providing a clear framework that can explore the various constituents that surround the text and position it in context, and hence affecting its interpretation and reception. Pellatt (2013) argues that even though the translation practice is primarily a 'localization activity' whose main purpose is to set forth the

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Dr. Yomna Aly & Prof. Riham Debian & Prof. Abeer M. Refky M. Seddeek

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

foreign work to a new audience that does not perceive the language of the source text, it still entails further implications that lie within the "physical and ideological packaging of the text" (87). Moreover, a paratextual analysis of translated texts focuses on the relationship between the translation and the target reader (Genette 1997). In other words, it reflects how translators and publishers can act together as mediators between the target readers and the translated texts (Elgindy 2013). As Alvstad (2012) also states that "when publishers present their lists, books and authors on websites, advertisements, book covers, forewords, and so forth, these paratextual framings influence reception" (78). Accordingly, the application of a paratextual framework may be very useful for investigating translations as they are capable of unfolding "strategic maneuverings", whether economic, ideological, or cultural, through which a translated work is presented to the readers, which enables researchers to investigate how various translations are positioned within the sociocultural landscape. Additionally, they can be a very useful tool for discerning the extent to which translators are involved in the target text. In other words, a paratextual analysis is capable of elucidating not only the role of the translator, but also the other possible agents that could be involved in the translation process, including the publishers, and editors and how their contributions could influence the reception and legitimacy of the translated work (Deane-Cox 2014). All in all, paratexts can serve as a significant analytical tool for understanding the implications for cultural mediation and literary hierarchies, which may indicate the way various translations interact with each other and their status with an incessantly developing sociocultural contexts (Deane-Cox 2014).

Paratranslation

Based on the work of Genette, the concept of paratranslation was later introduced by the University of Vigo (i.e. the Vigo School) in Spain as a methodological tool for examining paratextual elements in translated works. Yuste Frías, a Professor at the University of Vigo, is considered one of the key scholars

who have outlined the primary aspects of the paratranslation concept. The concept of paratranslation goes beyond the scope of the textual constituents to encompass not only all the verbal and non-verbal elements that can contribute to the production of a translated text, but also the broader context surrounding the translation process including the visual elements, cultural factors, the role of the translator or any other possible mediators that could be involved (Nord 2012). Based on Genette's definition of paratext, Yuste Frías (2012) defines paratranslation as:

> the zone of transition and transaction of any transcultural exchange, the decisive location for the success or failure of any process of cultural mediation. […] Paratranslation is always on the threshold of translation, where the translator is another agent who works (a) in a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public that […] is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (translated by Nord 2012, 5).

Accordingly, as the paratext is important for the text; likewise, paratranslation is essential for translations and translated texts. In fact, the concept of paratranslation plays a crucial role in translation, alongside the text, to establish the meaning of the selected text and create a "complete translation" (Yuste Frías 2012, 118). Moreover, paratranslation seeks to induce translators not only to read and interpret, but also to paratranslate the various forms of semiotic codes that either accompany, wrap, surround, introduce, or present the text anywhere in the translation (Yuste Frías 2012). Not only does paratranslation reinforce the presence of the translated text, but also affirms the "consumption and reception of the publishing world" (Yuste Frías 2012, 118). According to Yuste Frías (2012), the main aim that the paratranslation concept seeks to fulfill is to investigate "the impact of the aesthetic, political, ideological, cultural and social manipulations at play in all the paratextual productions situated in and out of the margins of any translation" (118). In other words, paratranslation can be a major indicator of the activities that often take place at the "threshold of translation" in addition to revealing the translator's subjectivity, the

features of the translated product and the various power relations performed by different ideologies in the dissemination and reception of translations (Yuste Frías 2012).

From an ideological perspective, Garrido (2011) identifies the main function of paratranslation is to describe the "intentional cognitive processes (ideological forms and constructions) behind the mechanism of cultural transfer" (67). Garrido (2011) also uses the term translation to refer only to the process of verbal transfer. Owing to its interdisciplinary role, paratranslation must act in accordance with the target society's beliefs and values. It is also the function of the "editors", whom are referred to as paratranslators to designate specific intermediaries in order to integrate appropriate foreign items into the target "cultural heritage" (Garrido 2011, 67). Accordingly, the role of paratranslation may include dealing with various semiotic modes and examining the suitable translation behaviours that would satisfy the demands of the target culture such as deciding the type of cover that the book will have (i.e. the design and editorial iconography), whether to change the title of the book or not, determining the type of target audience, as well as which parts will be translated (Garrido 2011). Once the editorial paratranslation project, in which the target text is shaped ideologically, is completed, it is then the translator's task to render the "artistic text" itself (Garrido 2011, 68). Although the translator's influence is limited or controlled, the target audience can still witness his/ her presence in their translator's notes, where they are able to assess the stance of power in the work they are translating (Garrido 2011).

Consequently, when comparing between the two concepts, i.e. paratext and paratranslation, one can find that the former is mainly focused on orienting the readers' understanding of the original text since the paratextual elements serve as 'threshold' navigating the reader through the text, whereas the latter takes into consideration the entire translation process including all of it multiple factors as well as their influence on the translated work.

The sociocultural aspect of paratexts

The sociocultural dimension of paratexts can play an important role in determining how texts are perceived, interpreted and situated within their social and cultural contexts. Paratexts are not just constituents that accompany the main text, these paratextual elements rather act as mediators that do not only mirror, but also respond to the cultural values and norms as well as ideologies of the societies in which they are produced and received. In the case of translated products, paratexts can play a crucial role in navigating the complexities of cultural exchange by (re)framing the original text for the target audience. Hence, exploring the sociocultural aspect of paratexts can bridge the cultural gaps, construct meanings, and thus influence how the translated work is received (Deane-Cox 2014). The significance of paratexts lies in their ability to position the translated work within a cultural and social context, that is relative to that of the source text as Watts (2000) notes that "paratexts evoke the work's difference while rendering that difference familiar or knowable" (32). All of which is intended to aid the target readers to decipher the sociocultural meanings embedded within the target text.

Investigating the sociocultural aspect of paratexts in translation can play a crucial role in revealing how the various paratextual elements interact within the existing societal norms, cultural perceptions and ideologies. Among these studies is Deane-Cox's (2014) investigation of (re)translations through employing a paratextual analysis in order to examine how the sociocultural conditions are capable of shaping (re)translations and how these (re)translated products position themselves in relation to one another. In the same vein, Hanna (2016) also employs a Bourdieusian framework to analyze the existing epitextual and peritextual constituents, and hence shed light on the elements determining the "production, dissemination and consumption of the Arabic translations of Shakespeare's tragedies" (10). Moreover, Mona Baker (2006) has also investigated the role of paratexts and how translators employ them to establish a particular ideological position. Through employing the narrative theory, Baker (2006)

demonstrates how paratexts are capable of employing not only the spatial, but also the temporal reframing in order to either downplay or emphasize the narrative perspectives.

In terms of the sociocultural aspect, paratexts can also play a pivotal role on foregrounding gender dynamics, power structures and cultural reception in translation. Translators usually employ paratexts to assert their agency as well as guide the social expectations. To exemplify, Jessica Malay (2006) examines Hoby Russell's use of paratexts in her translation as a means to become visible in a male-dominated literary space. On the other hand, Martin (2011) sheds light on the translations of a female translator, who despite adopting a "self-effacing" approach managed to establish a professional identity by means of detailed footnotes (16). In fact, all these examples demonstrate how paratexts can provide a flexible space for women to challenge the prevalent gender norms while asserting their agency.

As regards the cultural reception, paratexts can significantly influence how authors are perceived across cultures through shaping and reflecting ideological and cultural narratives. Furthermore, Henitiuk (2011) criticizes the paratexts surrounding the translations of Sei Shônagon *The Pillow Book* for reflecting regressive gender norms. In addition, applying a paratextual analysis can be essential for navigating intercultural and ideological power dynamics. For instance, Gaby Thomson–Wohlgemuth (2009) investigates the function of paratexts in maintaining dominant ideologies within a particular society where censorship is dominant. Her analysis of the epitextual elements, in the form of print–permit files reflects how paratexts can be employed as a tool of navigation and negotiation of the various power structures existing in translation.

Some examples of studies exploring the visibility of the translator include Sherry Simon's (2000) study of Spivak's translation where she highlights the translators' role which does not only involve introducing the authors of the original text to a new audience (i.e. target audience), but also raises questions about

appropriation and power. In the same vein, Susam- Sarajeva (2006) explores the influence of the peritextual constituents, such as prefaces, blurbs and introductions, on the reception of the target culture as in the case of her study *Theories on the Move* that examines how the paratextual materials accompanying the translations of Ronald Barthes' and Hélène Cixous' writings have shaped the perception of the French theorists and their ideas in the receiving cultures. In either ways, even though paratexts are shaped by context, they are still believed to play a crucial role in influencing that context either by challenging or strengthening the prevailing discourse or narrative (Batchelor 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, paratexts have an undeniable sociocultural role in shaping the way translated works are produced, interpreted and received by the target audience. Owing to their role as mediators between the source and the target cultures, paratexts can provide a context that frames the translation, which can guide target readers through the social, cultural and ideological aspects embedded inside the text. Through the various paratextual elements, whether they are peritextual and/ or epitextual materials, the target readers become more engaged with the translated work since they not only guide readers towards interpreting the text, but also contribute to the overall cultural discourse, and hence play a dynamic role in the meaning-making process.

In addition to their interpretive function, paratexts highlight that translation cannot be neutral since they are deeply interwoven with the sociocultural frameworks in which they are produced and received. Paratexts usually become a place where cultural differences are negotiated, and thus influencing the readers' perception and engagement with the 'other' of the source text. While being framed within the norms and expectations of the target audience, paratexts have the capability to reflect the ideologies, power dynamics and cultural backgrounds that form the act of translation and guide the reception of the text. Hence, examining translated works from a paratextual perspective does not only

enhance the understanding and reception of translation as a complex and context-based process, but also sheds light on their significant role in shaping sociocultural narratives, whether through reinforcing or challenging the prevalent power structure, ideologies and stereotypes. Paratexts are invaluable tools for deciphering the extensive cultural and ideological meanings embedded inside the translated work, holding their place at the crossing of translation, society and culture.

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