



Genuine Relationship: Pure Adaptation

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Abstract

The present research attempted to focus on the concept of *adaptation* (in theatre) from the perspective of Walter Benjamin's philosophical concept of *pure language* firstly introduced in 1923. In so doing, three adapted into Persian performed plays *Marg-e Foroushandeh* (Borhani Marand, 2015), *Ghat-e Dast dar Spokane* (Khojasteh, 2015), and *Pish az Sobhaneh-ye Jadali* (Rezaee, 2016) were studied along with their English written source playtexts *Death of a Salesman*, *A Behanding in Spokane* and *Before Breakfast*, respectively by Arthur Miller, Martin McDonagh and Eugene O'Neill. In each case, the source playtext and its adapted performed play had to be seen as the two main fragmentary languages detached from a larger whole in the fall from grace. Using Ladoucer's (1995) model of dramatic text translation, the alterations carried out in the main verbal and nonverbal text components (*speech lines/dialogues* and *stage directions*) were studied to see which performances were deserved to be considered as purely adapted ones. Finally, the results indicated that not all the transposed performances could be seen as pure adaptations rooted in *creativity* in its true sense, occupying a middle position between *dependency* and *deviation*.

Keywords: Pure adaptation, alteration, speech line, stage direction, page translation

Introduction

'Adaptation' has been considered to embrace numerous vague notions (appropriateness, domestication, imitation, rewriting, etc.) (Bastin, 2009, p. 3). From the traditional debate on the faithful/free dichotomy, it has mostly been viewed as a negative concept encompassing distortion, falsification or censorship by some scholars. Even in the context of theatre where adaptation predominates, inevitably occurring moving from page to stage, it may not be seen as positive or acceptable to some authors, artists or scholars. In this context, Bassett (1998, p. 91) provides an example that Pirandello, a dramatist, is of the opinion that playtext belongs



principally to the author, and performance is merely a copy, an attack upon author's intention. But from philosophical notion of pure language, adaptation is not to be considered as good or bad but beyond discussions of equivalence, fidelity and faithfulness. As Gay notes, adaptation is not a mere translation conveying "accurate linguistic and gestural equivalents from one culture and language to another." Instead, it can be examined as "extensive, original rewritings that seduce audiences into national mobility." In relation to the capacity of adaptation to create a new life, he adds that more than a barrier to the constant flow of structures across cultures, adaptation is "the catalyzer of creation, a celebration of a renewal and a confirmation of the liquid texture of literature" (2013, p. 4). Thus, as the *afterlife* of the original playtext, theatrical performance cannot be considered as a subversive copy occupying a secondary position. According to Benjamin, "a specific meaning inherent in the original texts expresses itself in their translatability," since translation (here, adapted performance) is more than transmission of subject matter and its goal is "a final, conclusive, decisive stage of all linguistic creation." (2000, p. 19). Overall, the *fame* and the *afterlife* of the original playtext can be highlighted and reflected through its fragmentary counterpart, the adapted performance.

In Benjamin's words, 'kinship' of the two main fragmentary texts (the original playtext and its adapted performance) does not mean that the alterations carried out convey very accurately the form and the meaning of the original. Following his concept, kinship is not 'likeness,' but a piece among other pieces of a puzzle, or in his words, a *vessel* complementary to make a *whole* (language of the truth). Thus, 'genuine relationship' between source playtext and its performance does not mean 'likeness' to each other but the alteration of the source playtext through its adapted performance in such a way to pass its *maturing* process and to achieve its *fame* and *afterlife* through its *creative* translation.

Theoretical Framework

In order to achieve the research objective, Benjamin's concept of 'pure language' illustrated in his essay *the task of the translator* (2000) was selected as the theoretical framework of the present study, so that the adaptations occurred in the considered performed plays could be viewed and discussed from that perspective. On the whole, the notion of pure language was



described through its relation to both the source and the target language (the source playtext and its adapted performance). The two verbal and nonverbal modes/languages (speechlines and stage directions) included in the texts were studied to see how each performance as a fragmentary counterpart (of its source playtext) depicts the implicit *language of the truth*, the *totality of intentions*.

Methodology

From Ladoucer's (1995) model of translation of drama texts, two factors, *semantic divergences* represented via the speeches (additions, omissions, substitutions, other modifications) and *stage directions* reflected through nonverbal modes (characters along with their actions, stage settings and props) were selected and studied.

Corpus

Three adapted into Persian performed plays *مرگ فروشنده/Marg-e Foroushandeh* (2015) directed by Nader Borhani Marand, *قطع دست در اسپوکن/Ghat-e Dast dar Spokane* (2015) by Danial Khojasteh, and *پیش از صبحانه‌ی جدلی/Pish az Sobhaneh-ye Jadali* (2016) by Arian Rezaee were studied in the light of their respective English written source play texts *Death of a salesman* (2002) by Arthur Miller, *A Behanding in Spokane* (n.d.) by Martin McDonagh, and *Before Breakfast* (n.d.) by Eugene O'Neill. In order to analyze the alterations, especially those made in speeches, it was as well necessary to consider the Persian page translations based on which the theatrical performances were produced. Thus, page translations-مرگ پیله-*Marg-e Pilevar* (1984), and *مرگ فروشنده/Marg-e Foroushandeh* (2015) as the only two included ones, and *قطع دست در اسپوکن/Ghat-e Dast dar Spokane* (n.d.) by the same director Danial Khojasteh were analyzed. It is noteworthy to mention that *Pish az Sobhaneh-ye Jadali* was produced and performed based on no page translations.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The author of the present research attempted to consider both speechlines and stage directions depicted on each stage hand in hand and in line with one another and to describe the analysis



done from the philosophical notion of pure language. To start the discussion, it should be mentioned that the three considered adapted performances were made under three different conditions: 1) *Marg-e Foroushandeh* found its way onto stage based on two published page translations: *Marg-e Pilevar* and *Marg-e Foroushandeh* by two different translators Ali Asghar Bahrambeigi and Ataollah Nourian, respectively. 2) *Ghat-e Dast dar Spokane* was directed by the page translator himself, and 3) *Pish az Sobhaneh-ye Jadali* was performed based on no page translations; reading the English source playtext himself, the director produced the performance.

As expected, in all performed plays considered, some additions, omissions, substitutions, etc. were carried out. However, the question was that how these alterations could be viewed from the philosophical notion of pure language, as pure adaptations? Having observed and analyzed the performed plays, *page translation* acted as a necessity for the performed plays to be considered as pure adaptations; it acted as a guide for the theatre director to move in the light of the playwright's intention and to preserve the foreign sense of the play while considering the potential of the creative stage. Since his/her intention is not the very true one, *creativity* should be considered as another necessity for the adapted performance to be seen as pure and to show the very style of the members involved. In the case of *Marg-e Foroushandeh*, in line with theme of the playtext, the director artistically harmonized the words rendered in each page translations, and created the alterations not only through his own creativity but also through that of the actors involved. In some scenes, some words were not only partially, but also fully added; some words were substituted by other words (mostly for the sake of speakability and performability). The content of some speeches were also delivered by another unexpected character while the essence of the play remained the same. For instance, in one of Happy's speeches: "... *You're an idealist!*" (p.13),

Page Translation by Ali Asghar Bahrambeigi:

... تو به آدم آیدالیست هستی! (p. 39).

Page Translation by Ataollah Nourian:

... تو به ایده آلیست هستی! (P.37).



it was added that Biff should *take the plunge to get wise with his life*:

تو شاعری...یه ایده آلیست، ببین، زن بگیر...زن بگیر بچه آدم می شی (06:37-06:52).

In addition to the considered strategies, in line with the overall theme and atmosphere of the source drama and to make the play more dramatic, *reordering* of speeches (along with events and actions), and *echoing* along with *repetition* were other modifications carried out in this performed play. As the following instance indicates, with stream of consciousness technique, Biff's speechline was reordered and followed by Willy's. His second speechline spoken in the third scene (noted on page 13 of source playtext) was also followed by Willy's in its alternative scene which was originally mentioned previously on page 7 of the source playtext. On the whole, back and forth switching of speeches, actions and events could be observed in line with the atmosphere of the play (being frozen in time while living in the present and illusionism) and intention of the playwright:

بیف: می دونی هپ، به نظرم این زندگی اصلاً چیز مزخرفیه. توی این زندگی همش باید دنبال یه چیزی بیفتی که از بقیه عقب نمونی. آخه این خوبه؟

هپی (سکوت)

ویلی: عیبش اینه که تنبله

بیف: من اصلاً این دوست ندارم. به نظرم آدمایی مثل ما باید توو بیابونا کار کنن، تو هوای آزاد.

ویلی: اصلاً چرا برگشت خونه؟ مگه نمی گه که اونجا زراعت می کرده؟ نه...نه، می خوام بدونم چی وادارش کرده برگرده؟ آخه اینم شد کار؟ (۰۶:۰۵-۰۶:۲۵).



Besides, some speeches were altered in a way that the words delivered at the end of a character's speechline be echoed immediately as the starting point of another character's. Such speeches were focused through repeating and echoing by two different characters, in two different voices, and in two different scenes to highlight the common illusion existed between the characters and thus to depict the situation more dramatically and to make it more influential for the target audience:

بیف: نه، نه، فقط اینا نیست، یہ چیزای دیگه‌ای هم هست که ناراحتش می‌کنه

هپی: چی؟

بیف: خودش خوب می‌دونه.

ویلی: خودش خوب می‌دونه.

لیندا: تو نباید اینقدر ارزش ایراد بگیری (۰۵:۴۵-۰۵:۳۷) (Arjomandi, 2016).

Beyond the alterations carried out in its page translation, a few alterations were as well noticed in the second adapted performance *Ghat-e dast dar Spokan*. Like the previous performed play, some characters' speechlines were partially or fully added to the performance. Some were also made to highlight humorous aspect of the black comedy. For instance, in one of Mervyn's speeches, *...their only luggage was harpoons...* (pp. 4-5), *Harpoons* was translated as and substituted by *cello bag* (05:37-05:43). However, that very creativity and new life was lost. The source playwright's or the playtext's intention was preserved, but the new life of the source text could not just be guaranteed by its continuity through repetition and uniformity. It demanded something more, the outbursts of creativity to release the very potential of the stage.

When it comes to pure adaptation, the source counterpart should be honored. It is to be completed and get improved but not to be hidden or overcasted. In *Pish az Sobhaneh-ye Jadali*, as the title represents, the term *Jadali* indicates the way the play was performed: the *discussion* with the audience. Observing the performed play, mostly the whole source



playtext was altered, not only in content but also in structure. It was not even possible to compare the speeches line by line; no page translation was applied; many linguistic and cultural mismatches were transferred to the Persian stage. At lexis, syntax, semantic and pragmatic levels, almost all speeches of Mrs. Rowland, the only onstage character were *rewritten*. When finished, the director invited some audience to act and create Mrs. Rowland's role in their own taste. But these very alterations were not in the service of highlighting the importance of *Before Breakfast*, but the creativity of the theatre director and his creative style without preserving the essence or the theme of the source playtext. When it comes to pure language, these adaptation could not be viewed as creativity (the existence of the source playtext is essential), but as *rewriting/manipulation* in its sociocultural sense or more negatively viewed, *deviation* from traditional faithful/free perspective. In other words, *Pish az Sobhaneh-ye Jadali* could be seen as creative if no *Before Breakfast* existed. Overall, as mentioned by Arjomandi (2016), some speeches were selected from the performance to indicate the case in the light of *Before Breakfast*

I knew all the time you were running around with someone. Your lame excuses about spending the time at the library didn't fool me. Who is this Helen, anyway? One of those artists? Or does she write poetry, too? Her letter sounds that way. I'll bet she told you your things were the best ever, and you believed her, like a fool. Is she young and pretty? I was young and pretty, when you fooled me with your fine, poetic talk; but life with you would soon wear anyone down. What I've been through! (para 36).

Pish az Sobhaneh-ye Jadali

مگه من خرم! مگه من بچم! آره باشه مرسی، ببین تو اصلاً صداقت داری و حقیقت می‌گی، باشه اصلاً تو فرشته‌ای، قبول، ولی دیگه گندش رو درآوردی فرشته! هر راست نشاید گفت، تو چرا این نمی‌فهمی؟ چرا نمی‌فهمی؟ چرا اون مجبور می‌کنی به من زنگ بزنی؟ بابا من دلم می‌خواد یه وقتایی دروغ بشنوم. اگه زن دیگه‌ای چشمت می‌گیره، بهش فکر می‌کنی، به من نگو، من اذیت می‌شم. چه جوری بگم؟ آخه من نمی‌خوام راستش بشنوم... (18:26-19:46).



Am I silly! Am I stupid! OK, Thanks! Yeah! You're right, you tell the truth. YOU ARE AN ANGEL, OK, but, don't go too far! Tis not good to come clean about everything. Why don't you get it? Why? Why ya make him call me up? I sometimes wanna hear lies man! If another woman catches your eye, if you think about another woman, do not tell me, it hurts me. Understand? I do not want to know the truth... (My translation).

Taking all the above instances into account, although some alterations were inevitably made to make the texts more tangible and consistent, based on the notion of pure language, to answer the question that how desirably each performance reflected the other *fragmentary* language to form a *whole* and thus the *totality* of their *intentions*, nonverbal text components (stage directions) should be studied in correlation with the verbal ones (speechlines). Having Studied characters along with their *actions*, *settings* and *props*, it can be said the most of the fame and the very true *intention* behind the source playtext and its adapted performance is in relation to nonverbal modes reflected through stage directions. Here is where the medium changes and the written playtext gives its place to the audiovisual one. In *Marg-e Foroushandeh* the factors included in stage directions acted in *harmony* not only to one another, but also to the speeches delivered. The two verbal and nonverbal languages were *supplementary* to one another. The *fame* of *Death of a Salesman* was being *watched over* on Persian language and culture stage; it became *highlighted* through *creativity* of the director and of actors involved. Setting and props, characters and their characteristics were altered, compensated and supplemented each other. For instance, in the source playtext (p. 3), the stage setting was described as the *kitchen at the center with table and chairs, a draped entrance at the back of the kitchen, bedroom to the right of the kitchen*, however a different decoration was observed in the performed play; no separate bedrooms or kitchen existed; the stage was decorated with *two chairs with a steering wheel as a car on one corner, and suitcases and wooden boxes on the other side and at the center*. It was designed in such a way to highlight Willy as a victim of time with his mind pulled in the past while living in the present time. Instead of the depicted *imaginary wall lines*, some *doors* were placed at the rear of the stage to represent different past to present times, through which Willy repeatedly entered and exited in the opening scene of the performance. In another instance, some of



characters' actions were altered along with some altered speeches though the essence or the intention of the source playtext was preserved more *artistically* and represented more *creatively*. As their first appearance on the stage, instead of *raising themselves up in their beds, listening to their father's voice* (p. 8), *Biff and Happy laughingly playing boxing appear on the stage* (05:00-05:03). Along with change of setting, some props were as well altered (omitted, added or substituted). Almost all factors included on the stage were acted *harmonically* although some omissions, additions or substitutions were noticed (Arjomandi, 2016). Such nonverbal alterations were in service of the theme of *Death of a Salesman*; the *fame* of this literary masterpiece was *guaranteed* and its new life was *maintained* in a *creative* and *genuine* manner on the Persian stage. On the whole, most adaptations were in the form of *recreation* since in Benjamin's words, they *neither covered the source playtext, nor blocked its light, but shone upon it all the more fully*.

In the case of *A behanding is sopkane*, although the essence of the play was preserved, it was more like *fidelity* to the source text style and intention with its representation on stage with little creativity. The stage setting of the performance was the same *hotel room* (p. 1), at which the entire story took place. Some alterations were noticed in props. For instance a *chair* was added to one corner of the stage, the addition of which was in line with the additional actions done. Carmichael of the adapted performance put the considered chair on the candle so that *Tobby and Merilyn* may not to be able to turn out it (Arjomandi, 2016). Overall, as mentioned previously, although some alterations made the black comedy funnier, in Benjamin's words, no creativity but *dependency* was observed in the way the speeches, actions and events were delivered on the stage. Although this adapted performance *did not cover the source playtext*, it *did not shine upon it all the more fully*. In other words, the totality of intentions was lost since almost *likeness* rather than *kinship* relationship existed.

Finally, almost all the stage directions were altered along with the altered speeches in *Pish az Sobhaneh-ye Jadali*. Even Characters, theme of the play and intention of the playwright had all been lost. Just *Before Breakfast* acted as a *hint* or *inspiration* for the director to produce a performance based on his contemporary social issues or problems identified. Although like the one-acted play *Before Breakfast*, merely one seen and heard character was on the stage



(of the main performance acted by the actress not the audience), Mrs. Rowland of the play was completely altered. Since she was the only character onstage and didn't addressed by others, her name remained hidden. Her appearance, actions, situation, daily routines and almost all things were different. She was not "*of medium height, inclined to a shapeless stoutness, ...in early twenties but looking much older*" (para 3), but an *opposite* character with quiet different physique and status. For instance, in one of her speeches she mentions that she *plays sports*, thus paying attention to her body and fashion:

ملت آرزوشونه زن اهل ورزش داشته باشن، اون وقت این بدبخت بی لیاقت (13:24-13:29).

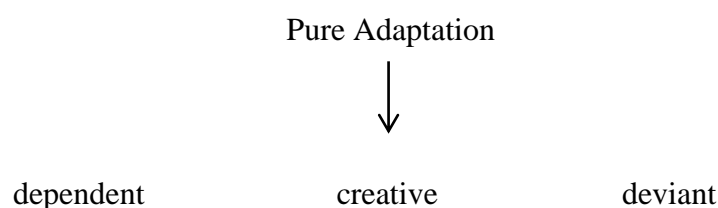
Furthermore, name of *Alfred*, the unseen husband character behind the closed door of a fictitious door, was substituted by Persian name *Farzad* and some other names, for instance, *Siamak* were added to performance (Arjomandi, 2016). Overall, the source playtext's radiance was covered and the performance was produced in its freest form of adaptation; a detached play with little attention to its source. It didn't act as a fragmentary counterpart to complement *Before Breakfast*, but a piece belonging to a different puzzle

In conclusion, in the context of theatre translation and especially performance, some alterations inevitably occur. If not looking from the traditional viewpoint of faithful/free dichotomy, but from philosophical viewpoint of pure language, the concept of pure adaptation, the genuine relationship between the original playtext and its adapted performance, starts to reflect its true identity not as faithful or dependent nor as betrayal or deviant, but as *creative* and *counterpart*. Having studied the three performed plays in the light of their source playtexts and page translation(s) (if applied in the production of performance), the philosophical notion of pure language was most desirably perceived through *Marg-e Foroushandeh*, where the *maturing process* of *Death of a Salesman* was reflected while the *birth pangs* of the adapted performed play itself was being *watched over*. As Laera notes, "Theatre returns, it always does. It returns to places where it has already been before and to times in which it has already appeared," adding that theatre "refashions beliefs, recycles old and used objects and reassembles them into a new embodied experiences," adapting itself to present situations and alters, the way an animal species struggles to survive through



evolution, not only to remain alive, but also to change the world. Thus, It “never stops adapting its features to the world and the world to its features” (2014, p. 1).

On the whole, *cooperative* nature of a performed play (cooperation between *literary system*, meaning page translators/translations and *theatrical system*, meaning director, actors and all the other theatre members involved) helps a pure adapted performance be (re)created out of its source playtext. Another cooperation also exists inside the one mentioned: between the two correlated verbal and nonverbal languages within in the play (the speeches and the stage directions). *Pure adaptation* reflects *afterlife* and *fame* of the source playtext through its *Creativity*. Not only creativity shows the very style of the theatre members involved, but also the intention of the original playtext which is capable of being highlighted and performed on the stage of another language and culture all the more fully. Pure adaptation is not to imitate, it is not coward or limited, it is not very free to smash the soul or the body of the original playtext or to hide or to fake it; it is to *release delicately* and *artistically*, the very hidden potential of the source playtext on stage and that of the stage itself. It is to give the *new life* to both the source playtext and itself in a way not to be radically removed from the original. It serves itself not to be considered as secondary, but a primary component element of the original/the whole and to release its very creative essence through which its counterpart, the source playtext, becomes more radiant.





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