145 Years of Finnish Shakespeare Retranslation: The Next Move

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Abstract

According to the Retranslation Hypothesis, a retranslation always tends to be more faithful to the source text and culture than the first translation, which in turn tends to reduce the foreignness of the source text. However, the hypothesis rarely proves to be valid. This finding contests the traditional way of placing translations along such continuums as “foreignisation-domestication”. The study of translations, and especially retranslations, calls for a broader point of view which takes their many-facetedness better into account. In this paper I will take a look at two of Shakespeare’s plays which have recently been retranslated into Finnish and published as books. The purpose is to deal with the plays expressly as Finnish retranslations, that is, as “newcomers” in a distinct group of texts which is governed by its own translation tradition. I will, above all, focus on the role of the copyeditors of these contemporary retranslations, and discuss how the copyeditors have affected the retranslations by regulating the way in which the preceding translations are allowed or forbidden to enter the retranslations. By focusing on the concealed work of the copyeditors, I wish to further contest the uncomplicated view of translation offered, for example, by the Retranslation Hypothesis.

1 Introduction

The starting point of the present paper is the Retranslation Hypothesis (RH) as formulated by, for example, Gambier (1994). According to the RH, a retranslation always tends to be more faithful to the source text and culture than the first translation, which in turn tends to reduce the foreignness of the source text (ibid: 414). However, it should be born in mind that the RH is, like the very name assigned to it implies, a hypothesis which would appear to be invalid in many cases, as pointed out by, for example, Paloposki & Koskinen (2004). So before venturing any further, it is crucial to emphasise that the status of the RH as one of the possible universals of translation has already been called into question, and at least the need for modifying the hypothesis, as it currently stands, has clearly been pointed out.

The purpose of this paper is to consider the applicability of the RH to Finnish Shakespeare translation, paying special attention to the most recent retranslation project of Shakespeare’s complete works, launched by WSOY (one of the most prominent publishers in Finland) in 2003. This project is currently in progress with 22 of the total of 37 plays published (by August 2009). The contemporary translation project and translating Shakespeare’s plays into Finnish in general constitute an interesting object of study from
the point of view of retranslation because Shakespeare’s plays have been translated and retranslated in great numbers into Finnish, both for the page and the stage. The history of translating Shakespeare into Finnish is also surprisingly long, especially if it is contrasted with the history of original Finnish literature. Whereas the first Finnish rendition of Shakespeare was completed in 1834, the first original Finnish novel Seitsemän veljestä by Aleksis Kivi was not published until almost forty years later in 1870. As William Shakespeare’s entire output of dramatic texts is, at the moment, being translated into Finnish again, and the first Finnish retranslation of Shakespeare’s text was published in 1864, the history of retranslating Shakespeare into Finnish currently spans 145 years, which is far longer than the existence of original Finnish literature.

The extensive material available in the field of Finnish Shakespeare translation makes it possible to contest the typical ways of looking at retranslations, especially those of this particular text type. In addition to RH, the established continuums or binaries such as “foreignisation-domestication” and “faithfulness-assimilation” can be effectively called into question. These theoretical models have their merits in the way in which they help to understand certain general tendencies, but at the same time they give a simplified picture of the circumstances in which translations are actually made and, consequently, dismiss some practical details that may be crucial if the actual practice of “giving birth to a translation” is to be understood. The shortcomings of these theoretical models in the context of Finnish literary translation have been pointed out, for example, by Paloposki (1996; 2002).

After the “faithful” translations made in the late 1800s and the first half of the 1900s, Finnish Shakespeare translation, both on the stage and the page, has increasingly taken liberties and distance from the English-language originals, and emphasised the director’s or the translator’s role as an interpreter. The contemporary retranslation project, however, seems to be very strongly characterised by the desire to return to the source text. For example, the publisher has set an official source text edition (Oxford World’s Classics) for the project which is considered the definitive authority, and the way the function of the new translations (i.e. they are intended as the definitive set of Finnish Shakespeare translations for decades to come) affects their form and content is taken into serious consideration (Koivisto-Alanko 2003; Martin 2003). However, because of the extensive history of Finnish Shakespeare translation, I am arguing in this paper that it is, in fact, impossible for the ongoing retranslation project to carry out a successful return to the so-called source text anymore, not so much because of the debatable origins or complex nature of the source texts themselves, but rather because the tradition of translating Shakespeare into Finnish is so strong and because there are so many existing Finnish-language models that inevitably dominate the conception of what “Finnish Shakespeare” should be like. Therefore, a broader point of view (broader than the one offered by, for example, the RH) which takes the many-faceted nature of Finnish Shakespeare translation better into account is called for.
In this paper I will take into account a variable or a facet which has largely been ignored in the study of published literary translations up to the present, namely the influence of the copyeditors. I will discuss the ways in which the copyeditors seem to have influenced the contemporary retranslations of Shakespeare’s plays not only by controlling the way in which the “translation-in-the-making” relates to the English-language edition, but also by regulating the way in which the preceding (canonised as well as non-canonised) Finnish translations are allowed or forbidden to enter the contemporary retranslations. In other words, I intend to contest the straightforward picture offered by the RH (i.e. a retranslation always takes a step closer to the original) by focusing on the publisher and especially their representatives, the copyeditors. The copyeditors, who ultimately work under the parameters set by the publisher, have the power to influence the translation alongside the translator, and they also have, potentially, a great deal of authority to challenge the translator’s solutions on the basis of what “Finnish Shakespeare” should be like. Ultimately, the goal of this paper, and the goal of my current research on the whole, is to criticise the Western idea of the autonomous translator, and to shift the focus from the translators to the interplay of the translators and the copyeditors.

As my central arguments in this paper, I present that (1) the contemporary Finnish translations of Shakespeare’s plays (at least those of the most frequently retranslated ones) contest the RH, and that (2) even though the contemporary retranslation project is, allegedly, a return to the “source text” (that is, the Oxford World’s Classics editions of the plays are considered the highest authority), the previous (re)translations also seem to have a considerable influence on it.

2 Theoretical Background

As pointed out by Chesterman (2005) among others, the entire field of Translation Studies is currently troubled by conceptual confusion. This confusion also applies to the concept of retranslation, which should be defined as clearly as possible if the RH is to be discussed. So the question that needs to be asked in the context of the present paper is the following: should the concept of retranslation be either defined as (1) translation that is explicitly performed on the basis of an existing translation or translations, or is it clearer to employ the concept of retranslation (2) whenever there exists a previous translation (or multiple translations) and a new translation is made, regardless of whether or not the existing translation(s) of the same ST are actively taken into account in the translation process? In the case of the present subject, I would go with the latter of the two definitions of my own formulation.

If the latter of the two above definitions is adopted, the concept of translation tradition becomes topical and needs to be taken into consideration. Looking at the history of

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Kääntämisen ja tulkauksen tutkimuksen symposiumin verkkojulkaisu
Electronic proceedings of the KäTu symposium on translation and interpreting studies
3 (2009)
translating Shakespeare into Finnish, it can be seen that the Finnish literary system currently contains a strongly established niche for Shakespeare’s plays. This niche is, I am arguing, governed by its own translation tradition, in the formation of which retranslations seem to have a seminal role. This role can be approached through the concepts of **canonisation** and even **translational norms**. As Antoine Berman expresses it, it is inevitable that “all translations will age, and it is the fate of all translations of the ‘classics’ that they will sooner or later be retranslated” (Berman quoted in Milton & Torres 2003: 10). However, certain retranslations achieve a canonical status, and are in themselves seen as great literature (Milton & Torres 2003: 10). So, even though there is a constant need for fresh retranslations of classics (for example, those of Shakespeare in Finland), some versions may become canonised, and they might achieve a more or less steady position. Following this line of thinking, I would argue that these canonised translations partly constitute a (loose) set of norms for following retranslations – for example, canonised versions of “Finnish Shakespeare” (most notably Paavo Cajander’s and Yrjö Jylhä’s work few decades before and after the turn of the 20th century) which might be considered linguistically and conceptually outdated, have a great deal of say on what Shakespeare **should** be like in Finnish.

The actual idea of translation tradition has perhaps most fruitfully been dealt with in terms of translational norms. For example, Andrew Chesterman (1997) has introduced the concepts **expectancy norms** and **norm-models**, which relate to each other as follows: “[i]n theory, we can distinguish, within the total set of translations in a culture, a fuzzy subset of texts which are felt to conform very closely, prototypically as it were, to the relevant expectancy norms [readers’ expectations, basically]; such translations tend to assume the status of ‘norm-models’ […]” (65). Dealing with translation tradition makes it necessary to also deal with **textual models**. Theo Hermans (1996), among others, speaks about the influence of “model” translations: “Translating ‘correctly’ […] amounts to translating according to the prevailing norm, and hence in accordance with the relevant, canonized models” (37). I would argue that in the case of Finnish Shakespeare translation, these canonised models largely comprise of Paavo Cajander’s translations (published between 1879 and 1912) because they were, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the first Finnish translations of Shakespeare, and in any case they function as necessary points of comparison for the subsequent retranslations. Before the ongoing retranslation project, many of Shakespeare’s plays, such as *Coriolanus* and *Troilus and Cressida*, only existed in Finnish as translated by Cajander.

If the title of this paper, “145 years of Finnish Shakespeare retranslation”, is considered in the light of the above-mentioned, some interesting developments in the history and tradition of translating Shakespeare into Finnish can be pointed out. The first Finnish rendition of Shakespeare was Jaakko Fredrik Lagervall’s *Ruuunulinna*, a clear adaptation of *Macbeth*, published in 1834. The first “proper” translation of Shakespeare’s play was, again,
Macbeth, this time translated by Kaarlo Slöör-Santala in 1864. However, the 1864 translation of Macbeth was, in effect, a retranslation because of the existence of Ruunulinna. My point is that even though Ruunulinna was an adaptation, was not popular and was never performed on stage, it was the first representation of Shakespeare’s text in Finnish. Therefore it necessarily functioned as a foundation on which the subsequent translations would ultimately be built.

If the retranslations of Macbeth that followed Ruunulinna are examined, it can be seen that Paavo Cajander’s 1885 translation was clearly influenced by Slöör-Santala’s, especially on the lexical level (Rissanen 1985; 2007: 203). Also Yrjö Jylhä’s 1936 translation of Macbeth, as well as Eeva-Liisa Manner’s first Shakespeare translations were clearly based on Cajander’s work, in many cases to the extent that they should rather be regarded as revised editions of Cajander’s translations (Rissanen 2007: 204). So there is a distinct “chain of influence” in operation in the field of Finnish Shakespeare translation, and I am arguing that something to this effect is taking place also in the contemporary retranslations.

3 The Translation Process

Since this paper intends to take the work of the copyeditors into account, the translation/publication process needs to be carefully illustrated. The process has gone roughly as follows (although the scheme has varied depending on the translator and their style of working). The process has commenced with the publisher’s selection of the authoritative source texts as well as the translators taking part in the project. The primary source text edition for all plays is Oxford World’s Classics, but also the Arden Shakespeare and other editions are used to some extent. The translators have been either invited or selected through an application procedure. The translator, once selected, has made an initial draft of the whole play, which has been commented on by the main copyeditor. Each play is assigned only one main copyeditor, but they all specialise mostly in linguistic issues. The project involves three main copyeditors, Päivi Koivisto-Alanko, Alice Martin (who has copyedited the plays included in this paper) and Saara Hyypä, all of whom have a background in either Early Modern English studies or professional translating. (Koivisto-Alanko & Martin 2009.)

After commenting on the manuscript, the main copyeditor has submitted it back to the translator and, at the same time, to the consultant (who must also be regarded as a copyeditor). The consultant in the project is Matti Rissanen, one of the leading Shakespeare and Early Modern English scholars in Finland, and he assumes the role of a neutral commentator (Rissanen 2009). The consultant has in turn commented on the translator’s and the main copyeditor’s work, concentrating on whatever stands out from the text and needs revision. Finally, the translator has made the necessary corrections on the basis of the
main copyeditor’s and the consultant’s feedback and submitted the manuscript to the publisher. After this, the final draft has been proofread and checked by various different readers, and some slight changes have also been made at this point. However, as these chances are undocumented it is not clear who is behind them and what they actually are. (Koivisto-Alanko & Martin 2009.)

4 Shakespeare in Contemporary Retranslation

In this paper I concentrate on the commented manuscripts of Macbeth, a popular tragedy, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, a popular comedy. The translator Matti Rossi has granted the permission to use these two as research material. As for my method of carrying out the research, I have first (1) selected a short passage from each of the plays, (2) had a look at the translator’s initial solution in the manuscript of the contemporary retranslation, then (3) had a look at how the copyeditors have responded to the initial solution, then (4) compared the editorial comment with the solutions in the earlier (published) translations, and finally (5) had a look at what the resulting version in the contemporary translation looks like, in other words, whether the translator has altered his initial solution on the basis of the copyeditor’s comment. The purpose of the following analysis is not to be comprehensive, but rather to point out, with the aid of illustrative examples, some distinct characteristics with regard to the general applicability of the RH that seem to rise from the kind of empirical material I am using.

4.1 Macbeth and the “Foul-Fair Problem” (Act I, Scene I)

Macbeth is perhaps the best example of a tragedy by William Shakespeare that has been popular in Finland. It has been performed on stage in Finland in 22 Finnish-language theatre productions between 1887 and 2008 (Finnish Theatre Information Centre 2009), and it has been published as 6 different translations, which makes it the most frequently retranslated of Shakespeare’s plays in Finland. In Matti Rossi’s contemporary translation published in 2004, the source text edition set by the commissioner is officially regarded as the ultimate authority. But it is at all feasible to think, in the light of the position expressed in the introduction of this paper, that the contemporary translations really do mark the return of the source text, as seems to be the intention?

To provide some insight into this question, I will next take up a short but, in my mind, enlightening passage from the very beginning of Macbeth. Examining the published Finnish translations of the play seems to reveal a specific problem area in one of the lines attributed to the Three Witches. I have chosen to refer to this problem as the “foul-fair problem”. The line, located in the opening scene of the play in which the Three Witches
meet, is reprinted in Example 1 as it reads in the contemporary translation project’s official source text edition:

(1)  

*Fair is foul, and foul is fair,*  
*Hover through the fog and filthy air.*  
(Shakespeare 2008a: 95).

In the heart of the problem most likely lay the words *foul* and *fair*, which have many connotations in the English language. These connotations are readily taken advantage of in *Macbeth*, notably on the symbolic level. The question that naturally follows is how these connotations should be taken into account when the play is translated into Finnish.

In *Ruunulinna*, the Three Witches’ line has been edited considerably. The translator (or adaptor) Jaakko Fredrik Lagervall, who has converted the original blank verse into runic Kalevala-meter, expands on the play with the original opposites (foul and fair), as evident in Example 2:

(2)  

*Pane mustaan valkiaa,*  
*Nokeen sekoita kalkkia,*  
*Lunta hiilillä hivuta,*  
*Nokea liijulla kihnuta,*  
*Varia jääällä jäähytä,*  
*Vilua tulella lämmität,*  
*(Liehtovat paletta,)*  
*Liehtokaam, kiehtokaam,*  
*Painakaamme paletta,*  
*Vastustakaam valetta;*  
*Nostakaamme painumaan,*  
*Painakaamme nousemaan,*  
*Liehtokaam, kiehtokaam.*  
*(Katoavat.)* (Lagervall 1834: 8).

Repetitions typical of the Kalevala-meter introduce opposites such as soot and lime, coal and snow, as well as hot water and ice. However, the main point of interest is that Lagervall uses the opposites *musta* and *valkia* (black and white) and other imagery associated with this colour contrast.

Example 3 gives the solutions in all of the published translations (except *Ruunulinna*) preceding the most recent version completed in 2004:

(3)  

Slöör-Santala 1864:  

*Häijy on kaunis ja kaunis on häijy,*  
*Läpi sumun ja pilvien noidat ne leijuu.*  
(Shakespeare 1864: 6).

Cajander 1885:  

*Häijy on kaunis ja kaunis on häijy;*  
*Samussa ja pilvissä noidat ne leijuu.*  
(Shakespeare 1994: 3).
In his 1864 translation, Kaarlo Slöör-Santala interprets “foul” as häijy (wicked, evil) and fair as kaunis (beautiful). Paavo Cajander’s 1885 solution is practically the same as Slöör-Santala’s, and for example Rissanen (1985; 2007: 203) points out that it is very likely that Slöör-Santala’s work influenced Cajander to a great extent. Yrjö Jylhä, in turn, interprets foul as inha (an archaic form of disgusting). Rossi, in his first published translation of Macbeth (1984), replaces “foul” with harha (illusion, delusion), and “fair” with tosi (real, true).

In the manuscript of his contemporary translation, Rossi offers his previous solution, as shown in Example 4:

(4) Rossi 2004 (manuscript): Harha on totta ja totuus on harhaa, se usvaksi muuttuu ja käsistä karkaa. (Shakespeare 2004a: 3).

However, as it appears in Example 5, the main copyeditor thinks that replacing the “foul-fair” pair with harha (delusion) and tosi (real, true) does not work here because it does not convey one of the most central themes in the play (i.e. light and darkness). The consultant agrees with the main copyeditor and emphasizes that these references should be retained.

(5) Main copyeditor: Upeaa, mutta! vrt s. 8 pimeänkirkas fair/foul viittaus ei toimi, ja hover-verbi luult.viittaa noitiin eikä ed. riviin (Shakespeare 2004a: 3).

Consultant: Kommenttisi on oikea ja tärkeä! Tulkitjat tuntuvat olevan sitä mieltä, että noitten näennäisen inkoherentti loitsutilu ennustaa Macbethin kohtaloa ja nän viittaa siihen. Siis viittausten säilyttäminen oisil arvokasta, milloin mahdollista. (Shakespeare 2004a: 3).

As shown in Example 6, Rossi’s solution is to replace “foul” with musta (black) and “fair” with valkea (white) in the published version. Although the comparison might not be entirely apt, the solution strikes as very reminiscent of Lagervall’s (musta – valkia) in the very first Finnish adaptation of Macbeth (see Example 2).

Therefore, the above examples seem to suggest that the most recent translation does not, at least in the case of this particular translation problem, take a step closer towards the source text, but that it would rather seem to return to the strategy evident in Ruunulinna, the first Finnish translation (or adaptation) of Macbeth. Furthermore, as is evident from the examples, the copyeditors have clearly contributed to the selection of the final strategy. However, at this stage the explanation for why the return to the “original” Finnish strategy has taken place, and whether this has been intentional or unintentional, can only be speculated on. Nevertheless, the question remains interesting in itself.

In the previous example the copyeditors did not refer to the previous translations directly. In what follows I shall introduce an example from A Midsummer Night’s Dream in which the reference to a previous translation is made explicit.

4.2 A Midsummer Night’s Dream: “Yrjö Jylhä was funnier” (Act V, Scene I)

Like Macbeth, A Midsummer Night’s Dream has also been fairly popular in Finland with 4 published translations. However, the 39 professional Finnish-language theatre performances between 1891 and 2005 (Finnish Theatre Information Centre 2009) make it far more popular on stage than Macbeth, and in fact it is one of the most frequently performed of Shakespeare’s plays in Finland. In the following I am going to perform the same kind of reading as was evident with Macbeth, leaning on the same argument as before. This time, however, I am taking up another kind of instance in which the copyeditor has explicitly compared the translator’s solution in the manuscript with Yrjö Jylhä’s solution in his 1936 translation.

Example 7 below gives the opening passage from Peter Quince’s prologue in the famous “play within a play” as it stands in the Oxford World’s Classics edition of A Midsummer Night’s Dream:

(7) ST (Oxford):  
If we offend, it is with our good will.
That you should think, we come not to offend
But with good will. To show our simple skill,
That is the true beginning of our end. [...]  
(Shakespeare 2008b: 237).

This passage is rich in wordplay, and the purpose is possibly to convey the nervousness and inexperience of the speaker. The desired effect is comical, and in this way it reflects the hilarious undertone of the embedded play as a whole. Matti Rossi has translated the passage in his manuscript as reprinted in Example 8:
In her comment on this solution (Example 9), the main copyeditor states, among other things, that Yrjö Jylhä’s 1936 translation (Example 10) would be a good point of reference when trying to make the subtle humour of this line “work”. Most interestingly, however, the copyeditor has also attached a photocopy of the page from Jylhä’s translation on which the passage is located, for the translator to refer to. Rossi’s initial solution is regarded as “a bit too crazy” compared with the ST.

The passage appearing in the published translation (Example 11) seems to bear resemblance to Jylhä’s solution in that it is now somewhat condensed (closer to the original length which Jylhä’s solution seems to observe), and it also seems to be inspired by the straightforward construction of Jylhä’s solution. Furthermore, in the published solution the verb häiritsemme (disturb) has been replaced with loukkaamme (offend), probably in the spirit of Jylhä’s translation.

The above examples work, in my opinion, as a fairly good example of the mechanics through which the contemporary Finnish Shakespeare translations come into being: not through taking a self-assured step closer to the “original” than ever before, but through paying attention to the existing translations and putting the solutions in them in good use.

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3 (2009)
5 Conclusions

The aim of this paper has been to consider the applicability of the Retranslation Hypothesis to Finnish Shakespeare translation, with an emphasis on the most recent retranslation project. Officially, one of the central arguments for the launch of the project is that it allegedly marks a return to the source texts (i.e. a particular English-language edition is selected as the authoritative source text by the commissioner). In this sense the RH, according to which a retranslation always tends to be more faithful to the source text and culture than the first translation, would indeed characterise the ongoing project. However, as I have been pointing out in the course of this paper, the previous (re)translations necessarily have a great part to play, and this is, in many cases, very graphically revealed through the copyeditors’ work.

So what kind of conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the points and examples presented above? In all fairness, it has to be admitted that the discussion has been quite simplistic and stayed on a rather general level without going into details. The examples I have presented must also be seen as isolated cases taken out of their contexts rather than ones representing the manuscripts as a whole. However, the examples that I did take up are, in my mind, alone enough to show that when compared with the straightforward view offered by the RH, the picture gets increasingly complicated once the translator-centred view is abandoned and the publisher and the copyeditors are taken into account. The RH also begins to appear simplistic because it does not take into account the translation tradition, in other words, what Shakespeare should be like in Finnish. It becomes clear that it cannot be uncomplicatedly claimed that the new retranslation project is a return to the source text, and this is precisely because of the tradition lying behind the contemporary translations.

Now that the applicability of the RH to contemporary Finnish Shakespeare translation has been discussed, the “next move”, that is, what the new translations are like compared to the previous ones, must also be considered. At this point it is too early to say anything conclusive, but I would personally be most willing to try out a hypothesis in my further research according to which the influence of Paavo Cajander, the translator of the “canonised Shakespeare” in Finnish, might be surprisingly visible in the copyeditors’ work. Of course, Cajander can probably be taken as a direct influence in a very limited number of cases but, then again, the influence of the translation tradition could be expected to manifest in an indirect fashion in most cases. This is especially so if a given literary system abounds with retranslations, just as the Finnish system abounds with retranslations of Shakespeare’s plays: all of the various versions “borrow” more or less from the previous renditions, and it might be difficult to pinpoint the “original” influence anymore. One solution to this kind of problem would perhaps be to compare plays that have a long translation history with plays that have only been translated once.

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3 (2009)
In conclusion, I have to admit that I cannot present any feasible adjustments to the Retranslation Hypothesis on the basis of my discussion. However, the argument put forth by Koskinen & Paloposki (2004)—that the mere order of publication is not the most important aspect in the study of retranslations (as opposed to what the RH is saying)—seems to be very much emphasised and supported by what I have discovered so far.
WORKS CITED

Primary sources


Secondary sources


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I have not provided English back translations for the Finnish-language examples due to space limitations, but I try to give a description of their main points in the text.