

The Work of Literary Agents: Translation, (Inter)cultural Intermediation and National Image Building

Duygu Tekgul

Istanbul Sehir University

Although the work of literary agents has been well documented within the discipline of publishing studies (see e.g. Gillies 2007, Squires 2009), it remains relatively under-researched in translation studies (cf. Milton and Bandia 2009). This presentation investigates aspects of interlingual, intralingual, intersemiotic and cultural translation that literary agents perform. For literary agents promoting national literatures abroad, such work often has implications for national image building.

The theoretical basis informing the study is cultural intermediation (Smith Maguire and Matthews 2010, 2012), which entails brokering between producers and consumers of cultural products. Originating in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 359) the concept is intimately linked with taste and cultural capital. Cultural intermediaries generate value through “objective practices and subjective outlooks” (Smith Maguire and Matthews 2010: 411) in line with the demands of the cultural economy. In the case of literary agents operating in the international book market, such intermediation has a significant intercultural dimension as well.

The research questions that the presentation aims to answer are: i) How does the work of a literary agent fit into the broader literary translation industry? ii) What types of translation does the literary agent undertake or commission in order to meet professional demands? iii) What does the study of the literary agent contribute to current debates in the sociology of translation?

The presentation focuses on a case study from Turkey: founded in 2005, Kalem Agency promotes Turkish literature abroad. The analysis is based on interviews with the founder, Nermin Mollaoğlu, as well as published news items and promotional material produced by Kalem.

The study examines the people, processes and products pertaining to translation within the specific context of literary agents, concluding that the complex and multifaceted work of a literary agent must be recognized as translation work.

References

- Bourdieu, P (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (trans. Richard Nice). London: Routledge.
- Gillies, M A (2007) *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880–1920*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Milton J and Bandia P (2009) *Agents of Translation*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Smith Maguire J and Matthews J (2010) Cultural intermediaries and the media. *Sociology Compass* 4(7): 405–416.
- Smith Maguire J and Matthews J (2012) Are we all cultural intermediaries now? An introduction to cultural intermediaries in context. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15(5): 551–562.
- Squires, C (2009) *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.