A Critical Study and Analysis on theory and practices in Cinematic adaptation

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Abstract

When communicating a message to a listener or reader whose mother tongue is not the same as our own, especially when that person does not even understand the language, we must use different ways or methods to get the message across as clearly as possible. While we can use gestures, signs, or noises in order to make ourselves understood, when communicating something written, we must turn to translators. One of the tools used in translation is adaptation. It is used in many cases, as cultural differences between different speakers can cause confusion that can sometimes be tricky to understand or simply prevent us from understanding each other. This paper will analyse and will discuss the paradox in the theory of adaptation.

Key Words- *Translation, Cultural Shift, Fidelity, Cinematic Adaptation.*

Introduction:

Adaptation is not to be confused with localization, however, which is used when the target audience speaks a different variant of the same language, such as in the case of Latin America. When adapting a message, we are not translating it literally. This does not mean, however, that when adapting a message or idea we are being unfaithful to the original message, or that we are not doing our job well (translating). Simply, there are situations in which it is required. British scholar Peter Newmark defines adaptation, taken from Vinay and

Darbelnet, as, "The use of a recognized equivalent between two situations. It is a process of cultural equivalence: Dear Sir/Muyseñormío; Yours faithfully/Le saludaatentamente."

Adaptation and Translation:

Adaptations, also known as "Free Translations" are when the translator substitutes cultural realities or scenarios for which there is no reference in the target language. A simple example would be translating "Friday 13th" from English into Spanish. In this case we would need to adapt the translation to the cultural reality of the Spanish-speaking world and translate it as "Martes 13" (Tuesday the 13th). Adaptations are equivalents, and can be seen more clearly in the translations of TV shows or movies, where conversations or cultural references must be adapted for foreign audiences.

When comparing translation and adaptation, we are comparing two ways of communicating a message. In many cases it is impossible to translate a text without making an adaptation, as a "literal" translation of the message would cause a loss of all or part of the meaning for the target audience. It is important to know when to adapt a message when an expression might have a more appropriate equivalent for a given situation. This makes us better translation professionals.

In recent years adaptation studies has established itself as a discipline in its own right, separate from translation studies. The bulk of its activity to date has been restricted to literature and film departments, focussing on questions of textual transfer and adaptation of text to film. It is however, much more interdisciplinary, and is not simply a case of transferring content from one medium to another. This collection furthers the research into exactly what the act of adaptation involves and whether it differs from other acts of textual rewriting.

In addition, the 'cultural turn' in translation studies has prompted many scholars to consider adaptation as a form of inter-semiotic translation. But what does this mean, and how can we best theorize it? What are the semiotic systems that underlie translation and

adaptation? Containing theoretical chapters and personal accounts of actual adaptions and translations, this is an original contribution to translation and adaptation studies .

Adaptation ,as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, has a plurality of meanings and applications, most of which allude to the process of changing to suit an alternative purpose, function, or environment; the alteration of one thing to suit another.In a media context, adaptation is defined as, "An altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., (now esp.) one adapted for filming, broadcasting, or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source." (1)

Although this definition is accurate, it is somewhat incongruous with contemporary theories of media adaptation, which have moved beyond the unidirectional movement of literature to film. As content moves away from notions of a single, stable source, and an identifiable author, and towards an era of transmedia creation by multiple entities and media conglomerates, it is the biological meaning of the word which would appear to have greater relevance to more contemporary notions of adaptation, namely; a process of change or modification by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment or ecological niche, or a part of an organism to its biological function, either through phenotypic change in an individual or through an evolutionary process effecting change through successive generations.

A text can not only survive the shift from one form to another, but it can also thrive in ways not previously possible in the original form. Consider a Visual property such as Star Trek, which began as a failing television program, but survived extinction through adaptation into other media such as animated television, comic books, novels, and feature films, before returning to television and commencing the cycle again. Since 1966, Star Trek has leapt back and forth from medium to medium, capitalizing on new platforms and technology, reinventing itself again and again for new audiences.

Inevitably, just as countless biological organisms have failed to adapt to changes in their environment, a text can also fail to survive when attempts are made to adapt it to a new

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form. This is often the case when an adaptation does not live up to audience expectations regarding casting, mood, or fidelity. While Star Trek (1) has survived multiple adaptations, attempts to adapt other television series such as The A Team, Lost in Space, and The X Files into film franchises have met with limited success.

Much like a biological organism, the field of Adaptation Theory is also constantly evolving in response to changes in its environment. On a basic level, the field is concerned with the "transport of form and/or content from a source to a result in a media context"[2]. For theorists such as Linda Hutcheon,the term adaptation has a multi-layered application, referring simultaneously to (a) the entity or product which is the result of transposing a particular source, (b) the process through which the entity or product was created (including reinterpretation and re-creation of the source), and (c) the process of reception, through which "we experience adaptations as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition and variation", or in other words, the ways in which we associate the entity or product as both similar to and a departure from the original.

Humans have a long history of adapting "texts" into different forms. Historical events and spoken legends were the inspiration for paintings and sculptures, plays, written tales, stained glass windows, and later, stories in the form of the novel[3]. Cinematic adaptations of literary and theatrical texts are as old as the medium of cinema itself, and as long as screen adaptations have existed, so has the tension between literature and film. Leo Tolstoy considered film "a direct attack on the methods of literary art", while Virginia Woolf felt that cinema and literary adaptations in particular, were responsible for the moral decline and vulgarization of modern society, invoking the biological in her description of cinema as a "parasite" and literature as its "prey" .

This disciplinary tension between literature and film has also informed adaptation theory, which, until recently, was primarily concerned with the translation of the literary into the cinematic. Such analysis traditionally focused on the notion of fidelity, and the perpetuation of a hierarchy which situated the literary text as a primary, touchstone, or

"source" text, and the adaptation as a weaker, derivative text. Accordingly, adaptations from literature to film (and other media such as comic books and animation) have often been branded in derogatory terms implying sacrilege, theft, impurity, dilution, and failure to preserve the integrity of the source. Such texts were also often judged on the misunderstood assumption that the goal of the adaptation was simply one of replication, rather than other motivations such as interrogation, reinvention, or exploration.

However, recent trends in adaptation theory have moved away from the dichotomy of film and literature and toward a focus on multidirectional flows across a transmedia model, concentrating less on what has been lost by a text during the process of adaptation, and more on what the text has gained by taking on a new form or variation. Theories of Intertextuality have also become a central element of adaptation theory, as the user compares the adapted text with not only the original, but other adaptations and similar texts in an ongoing dialogical process.

The entertainment industry has embarked into what (1) Thomas Leitch refers to as an era of post-literary adaptation, in which non-literary and sometimes non-narrative sources are adapted into storylines for feature films and other forms of media. Building on an established tradition of mining the superhero comic book and graphic novel mediums for inspiration, film companies have built successful film franchises based on video games such as Resident Evil and Silent Hill, board games such as Battleship, and even theme park rides such as Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean.

When content undergoes adaptation, it is subject to a variety of forces and factors, which are dictated by the nature of the source text, the reason for adapting the text, medium, market, and culture into which it is adapted. Large novels, for example, have traditionally undergone a process of compression in order to fit into a two-hour film format, while short stories have required some measure of expansion. An older text may undergo a process of correction or amendment if it contains anachronistic elements such as racial stereotypes, or may be shifted into an entirely different setting for purposes of social or market relevance. A

story which is adapted into a video game may lose elements such as pacing and narrative flow, but gain other qualities such as tactile interactivity and more scope for an extended and varied experience.

Like biological organisms, some texts need to change their characteristics in order to survive in a new environment. One successful example of transnational adaptation is the process undertaken to successfully adapt the British television sitcom The Office to the North American market. While the medium of the text itself did not change, elements such as scene locations, dialogue (including slang and cultural references), the look and demeanor of the characters, and even the storylines, were all changed to meet the sensibilities of an American audience.

A more controversial application of adaptation theory is that of the non-sanctioned adaptation of content which is protected under copyright law. Some theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, consider fan fiction, parodies, and other "unofficial" texts to be outside the realm of adaptation theory. Others such as Simone Murray, note the success of texts such as Seth Grahame Smith's Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, and query whether it is even possible to separate such texts from unofficial fan fiction, fan films, mash-ups, and video game "mods". Leitch, in an amusing take on the situation, even gives consideration to pornography films which appropriate the name of the original work, but empty the adaptation of most of the source text's qualities, citing titles such as Flesh Dance and Flash Pants as loose adaptations of the film Flash Dance.

Like the biological organism that thrives in its new environment, successful adaptations change over time, adapting to new conditions, migrating to new areas, and ultimately, doing their best to perpetuate their existence. The test of a good adaptation is one which achieves repetition without replication, – rather than being a mere a copy which sheds its Benjaminian aura, the adaptation both evokes and is amplified by a user's experience of the original, while also taking on distinct qualities of its own. A successful adaptation

balances "the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty", not only carrying the aura with it, but contributing to its continual expansion.

If we analyse and compare approximately five hundred year history of printing-press culture, and the thousand year histories of manuscript cultures, the hundred year history of film seems curiously brief. And yet, despite the relative innovation of the technology of the cinema, moving images have quickly become the central conveyors of storyline in our culture. John Harrington explains, "While other art forms have taken centuries to develop, the span of a single lifetime has witnessed the birth and maturity of film. It seems axiomatic that such rapid development has occurred because of, not in spite of, the contributions of other art forms".

The Film adaptation calls up the question of how we speak about the filmic adaptation of Novels. The conventional language of adaptation criticism has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply that the cinema has somehow done a disservice to literature. Terms like "infidelity" and "betrayal", "deformation", "violation", "Bastardization", "Vulgarisation" and "desecration" proliferate in adaptation discourse, each word carrying its specific charge of reproach."Infidelity" carries overturns of Victorian prudishness ; " Betrayal" evokes ethical perfidy; "Bastardization" means illegitimacy ; "Deformation" implies aesthetic disgust and atrocity; "violation" calls to mind sexual violence; "vulgarization "conjures up class degradation; and "Desecration" intimates religious profanity and Blasphemy .

As adaptation demonstrates, one might easily imagine any number of positive tropes for adaptation, yet the standard rhetoric has often deployed and elegiac discourse of loss, lamenting what has been "lost" in the transition from novel to film,while ignoring what has been "gained". In a 1926 diatribe, Virginia wolf, for example, excoriated the adaptations that reduced a novel's complexly nuanced idea of "love" to a "kiss" or rendered "death", literal-mindedly, as a "hearse".

Too often adaptation discourse subtly reinscribes axiomatic superiority of literature to film. Too much of discourse, I would argue, has focused on the rather subjective question of

the quality of adaptations, rather than on the more interesting issues of (1) the theoretical status of adaptation, and (2) the analytical interest of adaptations. To understand film, it is necessary to understand the way literary expression has been informed, extended, shaped, and limited it. Likewise, twentieth century literary expression reveals the influence of the cinema in its structures and styles, themes and motifs, and philosophical concerns.

If we study literary works of varying types and from various periods and comparing them with films based on them, we will be able identify the similarities and differences between these two media and discover the literary qualities in-built in almost all cinema. Popular film as we know it is essentially the result of applying the bonds of cinematography to the conventions of fiction (short story, novella, novel) and/or drama. The differences between a novel or play and the movie based on it often arise from the demands placed on the material by the conventions imposed by the art form or by the expectations of an audience concerning that art form. By studying the art of film adaptation we are necessarily forced to make peculiarities about the art forms being adapted and doing the adaptations. The research will focus in nearly equal amounts on literature, film, and the nature of adaptation.

Conclusion

The practise of adaptation has commercial aspects too: it is safer to buy the rights to a work than to develop original material.Film makers are not known for offering such blunt commercial reasons for making particular adaptations, and, while the writing of the adaptation is itself is a creative undertaking, writers of adaptations rarely announce innovative or bold approaches to their subject matter, tending instead toward caution if not reverence for their 'literary source', and couch their intentions in careful words.Film's adaptations are generally popular and successful: the biggest box-office successes tend to be adaptations, Since the Oscars began in 1927-28, more than three quarters of the 'Best Picture' awards have gone to films which are adaptations of novels.

Audience also want to see adaptations of novels, and film-makers want to produce them, and whatever hazards lie in the path for both, there is no denying the facts. For instance, Morris

Beja reports that, since the inception of the Academy Awards in 1927-8, 'more than threefourths of the awards for "best picture" have gone to adaptations . . . [and that] the all-time box-office successes favour novels even more'. Given that the novel and the film have been the most popular narrative modes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively, it is perhaps not surprising that film-makers have sought to exploit the kinds of response excited by the novel and have seen in it a source of ready-made material, in the crude sense of pre-tested stories and characters, without too much concern for how much of the original's popularity is intractably tied to its verbal mode.

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