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S. Y. Agnon: word systems and translation

EDNA APHEK / YISHAI TOBIN

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S. Y. Agnon: word systems and translation

EDNA APHEK and YISHAI TOBIN

Abstract

The stylistic concept of 'word systems' (Apek, 1979) illustrated in the pivotal, tri-consonantal recurrent Hebrew root X-Z-R found in a short story by S. Y. Agnon is defined and explained in light of the problems of translating these 'word systems' (junctions where the plane of the plot and the ideas converge with the linguistic plane), from Hebrew to English, or possibly any other language.

The subject of translation both of literary prose and poetic texts has been discussed at great length in the past twenty years by linguists and nonlinguists alike (Bausch, 1970; Brower, 1966; Cary and Jumpelt, 1963; Catford, 1965; Dagut, 1976; Nida, 1964, 1970; Patterson, 1959; Smith, 1959; Steiner, 1975; and others). Specific stylistic, semantic, and syntactic issues related to Hebrew-English translations have also been widely investigated (Dagut, 1978; Megged, 1966; Rabin, 1968; and others).

Although various approaches to the study of translation may differ, there is general agreement that the quality of translations should be judged according to the following three criteria: (1) accuracy; (2) equivalency of style or register from the source language to the target language; and (3) fluency and readability in the target language. Translations of poetry and poetic devices such as metaphor, rhythm, plays on words, meter, alliteration, repetition, rhyme etc., present further problems in translations as do idioms, cultural transference, and 'intranslatable words' (Keen, 1975).

One of the problematic elements in translation is the pun. A pun is defined as 'a figure of speech depending upon a similarity of sound and a disparity of

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