



**PALGRAVE STUDIES IN TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING**

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# Pseudo- retranslation

Mehmet Yildiz

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# Palgrave Studies in Translating and Interpreting

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Mehmet Yildiz

# Pseudo-retranslation

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*To Prof. Mine Yazici*

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## Introduction

**Abstract** This chapter first offers a brief history of the conceptualisation of pseudo-retranslation and a chronicle of the research on pseudo-retranslation from its identification as a distinct research topic to the present book, accounting for how my previous research has led the way for this book. Lastly, it presents a chapter-based overview.

**Keywords** Pseudo-retranslation • Conceptual origin • Pseudo-retranslational intertextuality • Epistemic pollution • Corrupted scientific communication

I have been professionally translating academic texts—particularly from Turkish into English—for about 20 years now. In November 2017, I was commissioned to translate a PhD candidate’s manuscript on metacognitive skills and teacher training. This is where I happened to come across my first case—as detailed in Chap. 7—of what I have come to call “pseudo-retranslation”. Over time, as I translated texts of this kind, I made a habit of referring back to the English material cited in Turkish academic works in Turkish translation. My purpose was to check the accuracy of the translation, especially when it was a struggle to make sense of the translated citation. My suggestion to the thesis author was then to cite the original

English material, in which case I wouldn't need to translate a faulty Turkish translation back into English.

In that one particular translation job, as I read a translated citation from a reference source shown as "Drmrod (1990)", I had difficulty understanding it and re-read it to make sure that I understood the segment correctly before moving on to translate it. I read the preceding sentences that I had already translated and the subsequent paragraph to put the segment at stake into context. I sensed that something was not quite right. The references section listed an entry for *Drmrod, J. E. (1990). Human learning. New York: Macmillan.* I copy-pasted it in the Google search bar by putting *Drmrod, J. E.* and *Human learning* in double quotation marks. Google suggested a corrected search item, which was *Ormrod, J. E. (1990). Human learning. New York: Macmillan.* After a few more attempts to find the book *Human Learning* by *J. E. Drmrod* and seeing that Google kept correcting my keywords, I came to understand that the book's title was *Human Learning: Principles, Theories, and Educational Applications* and it was authored by *Jeanne Ellis Ormrod*. Then, after finding the relevant item cited in the Turkish manuscript (a six-item list of metacognitive skills) on page 292 of Ormrod's book, I informed the author of the erroneous reference and suggested using the correct form of the reference and citing the original list in English instead of translating it. She agreed to this, and now she has a bibliography with the correct name and the correct title, as well as the correct version of the citation.

After submitting the translation to her, I wondered about the cause of this referencing error and performed an online search to identify the typographical error. *Drmrod* appeared in many other academic works written in Turkish. Moreover, I observed that the Turkish academic works including this error also featured verbatim the erroneous translation of Ormrod's six-item list of metacognitive skills. In order to study this further, I began to search Turkish journal and thesis databases for similar cases to create a corpus for a post-doctoral research project.<sup>1</sup> When conducting this research to compile my corpus, I identified verbatim intertextual appropriations across many Turkish works and noticed that several authors used the same translation, predominantly containing translation errors, in their works, presenting it as their own (re)translation.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, USA, for hosting me as a visiting scholar from September 2018 to August 2019.

I knew that a new problematisation would require representative terminology for a sound conceptualisation: what should I call this practice that takes scholarly “short-cuts”? The authors in my corpus purported to have translated source material into Turkish from an English original but what they had actually done was to take an existing Turkish translation of that work from the academic work of other Turkish authors, which means that they did not refer to the original foreign source text at all. In other words, the resultant wording in Turkish originated from a mock process of retranslating. This tactic was only revealed when I attempted to translate the Turkish citation back into English and established discrepancies by tracking down the actual original sources. This is how and why I came up with the term “pseudo-retranslation”.

The first account of pseudo-retranslation, based on the *Drmrod* case, is set out in an article published in 2021: “In Search of Patient Zero: Pseudo-Retranslation in Turkish Academic Works” (Yildiz, 2021). In this paper, I define pseudo-retranslation as “an academic author’s appropriation of (a portion of) another’s translation to present it as a (re)translation of a given source text and the text resulting from this act” (ibid.: 258). A complementary paper, titled “Identification of Morphological, Lexical, and Syntactical Obfuscating Elements in Pseudo-Retranslations”, identified the textual procedures in pseudo-retranslations that are instrumentalised to conceal the source translation (Yildiz, 2020). This paper re-analyses the *Drmrod* case for a different research purpose, revealing textual procedures typical of pseudo-retranslation. In these two articles, I used the software program WCopyfind to produce qualitative data (e.g., textual overlaps) and quantitative data (e.g., similarity rates between texts), comparing one online article and its 15 pseudo-retranslations. In the latter case, I operationalised a cut-off value of 0.70 for convenience by referring to Turell (2004). But it was also shown that pseudo-retranslations could be observed at similarity rates below this value.

In a third paper (Yildiz, 2022)—“Pseudo-Retranslation: A Novel Perspective on Translational Intertextuality”—this same cut-off value is used to analyse a new corpus which consists of 27 works that feature a common theme (Rokeach’s five assumptions about the nature of human values in Turkish). It investigates the intertextual properties of pseudo-retranslations by using WCopyfind and a more robust software program, namely R (Ver. 4.0.4), to produce more reliable similarity rates and to

create graphs of intertextuality. In this paper, the definition of pseudo-retranslation is revised as follows: “an academic author’s partial or complete use of another academic author’s translation [...] presenting it as a (re)translation of a given source text” (2022: 270).

These three papers have given birth to the research topic of this book and laid the theoretical groundwork to investigate the subject from a well-grounded perspective. To recap, the intertextuality of pseudo-retranslations is explicated in Yildiz (2021) and Yildiz (2020); then in Yildiz (2022), pseudo-retranslational intertextuality is problematised, meaning that the intertextual characteristics of pseudo-retranslation are examined; interdisciplinary, inter-genre intertextuality across cases of pseudo-retranslation is discussed; and the potential of pseudo-retranslations to disseminate academic knowledge in a distorted form is clearly pointed out.

This brief overview opens the way for another study to investigate further three significant research topics, which are (a) intertextuality in pseudo-retranslation, (b) the dissemination of flawed scholarly knowledge created by translation through pseudo-retranslations, and (c) the interplay between the two. The first topic is featured in Chap. 2, which discusses how intertextuality is a textual property by focusing on its inevitability and indispensability for the creation of text *per se*, and why intertextual operations are needed for the production of academic texts. The chapter also addresses the accumulation of academic knowledge, and outlines which types of intertextuality are applicable in academic text production. The chapter concludes by explaining how translation and retranslation develop and expand intra- and interlingual networks of intertextuality and broadens the conceptualization of intertextuality by foregrounding the contribution of pseudo-retranslation to intertextuality within and across scientific disciplines and text types.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of how the texts in the four corpora studied in each following chapter were selected, what the corpora are, and what analytic procedures were employed. Performing the analytical procedures to process the four corpora, Chaps. 4, 5, 6, and 7 attend to the research motives (b) and (c) above.

Chapter 4 deals with the contribution of pseudo-retranslations to the corruption of academic communication by causing “epistemic pollution” (Levy, 2018, 2022) through knowledge acquisition and knowledge distribution by analysing the corpus comprising one source translation of a list