Readers' voices for "complete retranslations": A case study of Agatha Christie's murder mysteries in Turkish

Seda Taş İlmek*

Abstract: This study intends to discuss how today's readers play an active and decisive role pertaining to re/translation processes and affect publishing houses in many ways. Benefiting from readers' views in electronic data such as journals, blogs and discussion platforms, this article will analyze the efforts of readers to make their voices heard for their demand of "complete retranslations." The analysis focuses on a specific case, namely Agatha Christie's murder mysteries in Turkish that have been translated and reprinted many times in years. It makes use of a qualitative analysis of readers' comments and criticisms and tries to understand readers' reasons for demanding retranslations. It also discusses the nexus between the notion of "retranslation" and readers' role as participants of re/translation. It concludes that readers are not passive, but rather active and conscious participants of re/translation processes. They express their opinions, make explicit criticisms, compare translations at various levels and issue a call for "completeness" in translated texts. This study indicates that, as one of the decisive agents of translation, readers highly influence the publishing world and often canalize online platforms to direct the publishing houses.

Keywords: retranslation, complete retranslation, readers' voices, Agatha Christie's murder mysteries

INTRODUCTION

Agatha Christie (1890-1976), known to be the author of eighty-two detective novels, gained a world success with her novels, playwrights, a series of six romance novels and an autobiography. Her murder mysteries were translated into 44 languages, turned into screenplays and also transposed to radio as well as theatre. Her enormous popularity brought her a commercial success in the world but also made her one of the most prominent authors of the 20th century. She

Department of Translation and Interpreting, Faculty of Letters, Trakya University, Edirne, Turkey

e-mail: sedatas@trakya.edu.tr; stone.seda@gmail.com

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^{*} Seda Taş İlmek (🖂)

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was moreover seen as typifying a literary genre, "detective fiction". She became the queen of detective fiction in the period between the two World Wars which is regarded as the Golden Age period. With her works, detective fiction continued to flourish in the 1940s and 50s.

Her murder mysteries widely fascinated readers with their engrossing and intriguing world that had an inviting nature for readers to solve a puzzle hidden deep inside texts. Bringing all the pieces of the puzzle was a difficult task requiring a constant curiosity and attention of readers. "Difficulty lures the reader into the web of the text; in wanting to know what happens next. We want to know what we are going to feel next about an event that is both an instance of moral degradation and a source of intellectual delight" (York 2007, 8). Christie's writing techniques include leaving the murder out of suspicion and directing readers towards other paths.

The first translation of her works into Turkish was the translation of Murder on the Orient Express (1934) serialized in Kurun journal and then published in Vakit Pocket Books in 1936. Following this translation, a considerable amount of Agatha Christie translations emerged in Turkish and she is known to be "the most translated author into Turkish" (Üyepazarcı 2008, 650). Ömer Türkeş (2018) explains that publishers have found out the goose that lays the golden eggs and a plethora of Christie translations in Turkish came on the heels of the first translation. Indeed, publishers rushed to translate her works, not just in Turkish but also in the other languages, for the flowering of murder mysteries accrued high status in the eves of the publishers and readers around the world as a consequence of the increase in the number of works of this genre. Erol Üyepazarcı, known as a Turkish researcher on crime or detective fiction of Western and especially Turkish works, points out the complicated and untraceable nature of Agatha Christie's Turkish translations:

Various publishers published tens of Christie translations; many of her books were published by different publishers several times, even the same publishing house published and presented the same book under a different title as a new Christie work. There are 184 Agatha Christie translations in our library. However, we don't think that we could reach all translations of Agatha Christie in Turkish. Among these translations, there were translations introducing the previous translations as retranslations by using different titles, sometimes making small changes or abridging the text or even adding parts lacking in the original text. Yet, the most interesting one is the publication of other authors' works

appropriating them for Agatha Christie. Meanwhile we would like to mention that some of the works written by Christie as theatre plays were presented to the readers as Christie novels in the form of novelised texts" (cited in Türkeş 2018).

As it is understood, with the discovery that Christie's murder mysteries loved and were highly demanded by Turkish readers, the publishers such as Altın Kitaplar, Ak, Akba, Şilliler and Taner Publishing House took every opportunity to benefit from this situation and went all lengths for reaching their potential Turkish readers. Thus, Christie novels took their places among the works of translated crime fiction, which acquired a central position in Turkish literary polysystem. Yet, this fact entailed a number of adverse consequences in time, and created a chaotic atmosphere for it became difficult to trace these translations and their quality became questionable. Today, the paradise of the Turkish translations of Christie's works (see Gül Özcan and Ersözlü 2019) includes abridged translations, reprints, retranslations, pseudo translations and translations with writer's name but belonging to some other detective story writers.

The troublesome atmosphere of Christe's Turkish translations took attraction of Turkish readers and they eventually raised their voices by criticizing translations, comparing both the source and target texts in the textual or paratextual levels, and making list of the existing translations to reveal the Turkish translation adventure of Christie. Readers usually make use of online platforms and as reviewers they comment on various dimensions of these translations. They desire to affect the publishing world and, most importantly, the publishers to canalize them for "complete retranslations", acting like gatekeepers. Thus, readers as reviewers may become the agents actually involving in the re/translation processes.

Dwelling on online data, this article aims at finding answers to these questions: Why do readers demand "complete" retranslations of Agatha Christie? What might readers' comments and criticisms on translations of Agatha Christie novels tell us about "retranslation"? and what is the "readers' role" in re/translation processes?

With this purpose, the first section focuses on the theory of "retranslation" and explores the role of readers as active participants of re/translation. The second section presents readers' reasons for demanding complete retranslations of Christie novels based on their comments and criticisms of Christie translations from various

perspectives. This section benefits from online data such as blogs, journals and discussion platforms in order to exemplify readers' efforts to canalize publishing world for "complete retranslations". The last section provides discussion and conclusion.

RETRANSLATION AND READERS' VOICE IN RE/TRANSLATION PROCESSES

Although retranslation has been a widely used translation practice, naming and giving it a frame occurred only in 1990s. Since it was put forward by Antoine Berman in 1990 (see Berman 2000), the phenomenon of retranslation has taken a great deal of attention among scholars. It was first associated with an idea of return to the source and mostly the reason of aging together with the need for updating the existent translations and attributing a supplementary nature to retranslations. Generally speaking, first retranslations were seen as directly related to a sort of progress or development, albeit often argued against by comparative case studies that resulted in "retranslation hypothesis" (see Paloposki and Koskinen 2004). However, the notion of retranslation flourished and gone far beyond this. It has been explored in a number of articles (see Vanderschelden 2000; Venuti 2004; Tahir Gürçağlar 2009; Paloposki and Koskinen 2010; Birkan-Baydan 2015; Taş 2018) with micro/macro case studies at textual or paratextual level, from historical, cultural and sociological perspectives. It was frequently tested by analyzing textual and extratextual translation strategies, focusing on agents of translation such as individual translators, commissioners, publishers and editors, scrutinizing motives involving aging, norms, economical and literary concerns, the dominancy of ideologies, the influence and pressure of governments or various institutions, deficiencies in the first translations, competitions between translations or publishers, etc. Special issues of journals (see Alvstad and Assis 2015), books (see O'Driscoll 2011; Deane-Cox 2014; Cadera and Walsh 2016; Berk Albachten and Tahir Gürçağlar 2019a and 2019b), and conferences (see "Retranslation in Context" and "Retranslation in Context II" Conferences) on retranslation not only highlighted the value but also pointed out different aspects of retranslation to be searched. In this context, today's digitalized global world entailed involving readers as reviewers and significant agents of translation.

The first scholar emphasizing the significance of the role played by readers was Tahir Gürçağlar (2005). For her, reader letters can be

valuable in understanding readers' expectations of retranslations (Tahir Gürçağlar 2005, 185; cited in Işıklar Koçak and Erkul Yağcı 2019, 129). Among other studies establishing a bound between readers and retranslations (see Erkul Yağcı 2011), İşıklar Koçak (2017) explores readers' active role dwelling on readers' reactions to re/translations in her paper "Readers of Retranslations on Online Platforms." She benefits from online data including forty varied texts from the selected sites between 2011 and 2015, and she concludes that readers as participant actors "question the reasons for retranslating, attempting to understand how to choose among retranslated texts, they criticize retranslated texts, and they demand better retranslations" (Isiklar Kocak 2017, 427). This also reveals that today's readers are much more aware of the re/translations or reprints; and, because of the technological advances, they use and increase their knowledge by sharing, discussing and commenting on re/translations via online platforms.

In a similar vein, Arzu Eker Roditakis (2017) conducts a study revealing that reader criticisms of a first translation prompted a second translation. She focuses on retranslation process of Orhan Pamuk's novel *The Black Book (Kara Kitap)*, with the demand of the author as a consequence of translation criticism of reviewers directed to the previous English translation. Orhan Pamuk's changing status in years as well as dynamics of target culture played an important role in readers' criticisms; and as a worldwide known Turkish author, he couldn't ignore his readers. Wishing to control his novels' reception and his own representation in English world, he took part in decision making process of this retranslation and many other retranslations of his novels later on. This exemplifies that "reviewers as powerful agents in the reception of translated literature by the general readership played a role not only in the decision to retranslate, but also in the way this retranslation was carried out" (Eker Roditakis 2017, 20).

One of the most recent studies was conducted by Işıklar Koçak and Erkul Yağcı (2019), entitled "Transformation in Readers' Habituses in Turkey from the 1930s to the 2010s". Researchers aim at portraying readers' perception of retranslation and the change in this perception using two different data, namely, reader letters published in *Yedigün* and *Varlık* magazines from 1930 to 1966, as well as online forums and blogs in 2011-2017 since retranslation is a hot topic of online platforms at this period. Their study discusses that "readers of the period between the 1930s and 1960s (....) seem to be indifferent to

retranslation, and they even question the necessity of producing retranslations", whereas readers of 2010s have more awareness about re/translations as they openly express their ideas and criticism at textual and paratextual levels, compare translations and comment on publishers, translators and editors (Işıklar Koçak and Erkul Yağcı 2019, 143).

In one of the recent books on retranslation studies, the editors provide a portrait of retranslation as a widespread practice in Turkey in their "Introduction": "The recent history of Turkey is marked by an abundance of retranslations" and "the "Ottoman-Turkish culture has been a culture of retranslation for many centuries" (Berk Albachten and Tahir Gürçağlar 2019a, 2). They also see "the motive behind the retranslation boom in 2000s in Turkey as mainly related to ideological, economic, marketing, and copy-right related developments" (Berk Albachten and Tahir Gürçağlar 2019b, 225). However, there remains an understudied area, "readers and their reception of retranslations" (2019b, 3). Similarly, Işıklar Koçak and Erkul Yağçı (2019, 129) claim that "the perceptions of target readers regarding retranslations have been widely neglected." Therefore, it can be said that giving ear to readers' voices may compromise a basis for examining different aspects of retranslation practices in Turkey.

WHY DO READERS DEMAND "COMPLETE" RE/TRANSLATIONS OF CHRISTIE'S NOVELS?

Readers' comments and criticisms on Christie re/translations and re/prints in online platforms not only offer invaluable insights into exploring readers' way of thoughts but also provide fresh perspectives on the notion of retranslation. Readers frequently make comments on three related issues: a) existing "fake" Christie translations; b) incomplete and old Christie translations, c) readers' translator preferences and marketing strategies of publishing houses for reprints. These are among the main issues that largely cause to disappoint readers.

"FAKE" TRANSLATIONS

As the queen of murder mysteries published more works and gained popularity, publishers tried to catch the trend of publishing her works. Christie's works increasingly met with approval from Turkish readers and many quick translations tagged along after the first Turkish translation serialized in *Kurun* journal. These serialized translations

were usually translated into Turkish by abridging, namely omitting some passages or chapters, so as to fit into the column and presumably to appropriate them for a determined publication dates in much the same way that the other detective fiction writers were translated. Many of them were published as books later and most strangely, and "fake Christies" emerged among the flow of Christie's translations. A blog, named "The room for lacking Christie novels and which ones are fake?" / "Eksik Christie Odası ve Hangileri Sahte?", underlines several publishers on this issue (see http://bibliofk.blogspot.com/p/eksikchristie-odasi.html). One of them is Aka Publishing House that published a great deal of "fake" Christie novels and most of them have the same picture on their cover. The blog provides a list of these books as "Aranılan Katil (John Dickson Carr), Düşman Dostlar (John Dickson Carr), Gizli Kuvvetler (Edgar Wallace), Kanlı Anlasma (Nicholas Blake), Morfin Ölüm Saçıyor (Patrick Quentin), Suçlu Kim (Jean Laborde), Viran Kule (John Dickson Carr), Yalan İçinde Yalan (John Dickson Carr), Yeşil Gözlü Canavar (Patrick Quentin), and Yıldızlardan Kan Damlıyor (Patrick Quentin)." Another one, Altın Kitaplar Publishing House also published four Christie novels "by mistake". These are "Ölüm Kapıda Bekliyordu (Antony Gilbert), Lanetli Aile (Herbert Brean), Sevimli Örümcek (...) and Ölümün Sesi." The blog claims that once the mistake was realized, these novels weren't published again. However, how this mistake occurred, who were responsible for it, whether they were compensated in time weren't clarified. Taner Publishing House published several "fake translations" in almost the same number that the others published fake translations of Christie. Some of them are "Şatodaki Hayalet (John Dickson Carr), Karakolda Cinayet (Jean Laborde) and Tenis Kortunun Esrarı (John Dickson Carr)."

The above examples from the publishing houses doubtlessly raise a number of ethical considerations of "fake" or "pseudo Christies" in Turkish translated literature system. Yet since Altın Kitaplar doesn't publish fake Christies anymore and the other publishers aren't active. This seems to remain as an issue to be searched with all questions of "how", "why", "who", "when" and "what". More significant and related to the scope of this study is the inquisitive nature of today's readers. Searching and sharing "fake" translations in online platforms, conscious readers invite Altın Kitaplar Publishing House, Christie's min Turkish publisher, to retranslate her works.

INCOMPLETE, OLD TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLATOR PREFERENCES

Among the plenitude of Christie translations in Turkish, readers make efforts to distinguish translations from each other. They criticize them by making comparisons between the source text and the translation, or the translation and retranslation in terms of "completeness" and "correctness". Starting from these criticisms, they express clearly their translator preferences.

The "Mysterious Situations" blog uses a salient title for Christie translations and translators by claiming that "Mrs. Gönül is the Murderer of Agatha Christie" (see https://www.polisiyedurumlar.com/2014/11/agatha-christienin-katili.html). As it is understood from the title, translation killed the source text as well as the writer; and so, the murderer was its translator Gönül Suveren. The writer of the blog goes on to explain the reasons for his negative ideas on Turkish translations and translator of Christie:

I have never thought of reading Agatha Christie novels from the source language. However, realizing that one of her famous books, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was 45 pages longer than the Turkish translation in its source language, I changed my mind. Thus, I learned that not only this novel but also most of her novels were translated incompletely (https://www.polisiyedurumlar.com/2014/11/agatha-christienin-katili.html).

It is obvious that the reader recognized the incompleteness of the translation by chance as a result of a comparison in the number of pages and started to doubt concerning other Christie translations as well. To put it more explicitly, the blog writer criticizes the publisher and the translator as follows:

"Unfortunately, apart from being bad translations, Altın Kitaplar Publishing's Christie novels were also incomplete. Bad translations of Gönül Suveren are of literary considerations and full of grammar mistakes, not to mention mistakes due to imprecise publishing. Readers have to read texts that partly lack of meaning integrity" (https://www.polisiyedurumlar.com/2014/11/agatha-christienin-katili.html).

Following these claims, the writer of the blog provides examples from the translations of Gönül Suveren regarding her mistakes, omissions and additions. Yet, is it always the translator to be found guilty? The blog writer exemplifies missing parts of the novel and feels upset that publication rights belong to Altın Kitaplar Publishing House since it doesn't show necessary attention to the translation processes. Tahir-Gürçağlar (2005, 135-136) explains that "the Publishing House defines its success in economic terms rather than literary grounds". In other words, the publisher gives priorities to economical matters the most by following fast and cheap production strategies to increase sale rates. However, readers aren't concerned with sale rates but they evaluate the novel's translation quality and criticize both the translator and the translation. Thus, the blog writer mentions a retranslation of the same novel, made by Pınar Kür, which is found very successful. The writer concludes:

"Pınar Kür's translation is clearer, sincerer, purer and more sufficient. One you finish reading the whole text, you feel the pleasure of reading a literary text. I wish Pınar Kür retranslated all of Agatha Christie novels" (https://www.polisiyedurumlar.com/2014/11/agatha-christienin-katili.html).

The blog writer, as a reader and reviewer, on the one hand comments on both the existing translations and their translators, and on the other hand provides proof for his negative expressions about them. Further, he brings forward the need for a retranslation. This also seems to be in line with the notion of retranslation that claims the retranslation to be done for the sake of returning to the source text and completing or perfecting the previous translations.

Similarly, Ülkü Tamer, as a translator, confesses his own journey of killing Agatha Christie through translation in the journal of *Milliyet*. He openly expresses how translation and its publication process handled at that time without any control and according to the decisions made in line with the demands of publishers or the order of the day. He tells that he wanted to earn money by translating as a university student, and translated a Christie novel's two or three pages in *Vatan* journal as a serialized form. Then, the journal wished to move to Ankara, and he was required to do a summary and shorten the rest of the text as there isn't much time left for the journal. There upon, Tamer summaries the rest of the novel off the record. After that, a small publisher, who sells the books in the street, wants him to translate a book; and Tamer mentions this translation adventure. The publisher not only makes up another title, shortens the serialized form and converts it into a book format, but also adds another text for the second

part of the book (see http://www.milliyet.com.tr/pazar/agatha-christieyi-ben-de-katletmistim-5150987). Clearly, Christie's novel became something quite different that the source text. Tamer accepts being the murder of Christie and her novel, underlining that many others killed Christie in the same way through translation. All these examples indicate that publishing procedures were mostly arbitrary following the best sellers abroad, without any control mechanisms or copy rights, dominated by economic factors and lack of literary concerns in the past. However, as seen in the present study, today's readers act almost like control mechanisms and they raise their voices about their literary concerns on existing translations of Christie.

A similar story refers to The Murder of Roger Ackroyd and its Turkish translation. The translator and critic Celâl Üster (2003) criticizes it as being "deficient" and "wrong". Doğan Hızlan (2003) names this situation as "translation murder". Then, Altın Kitaplar Publishing House recalls it from the market as Üster is found to be right in his criticism by the publisher. Özyurt (2003) says that "the cooperation of critic and publisher is of service to readers" in that case because "Altın Kitaplar Publishing took notice of Üster's warnings and decided a retranslation on the behalf of "respect to reader." Hüsnü Tere from Altın Kitaplar Publishing House mentions that, although the translation in question was successful in its own time, as time passes or changes, this translation also became old and a retranslation was necessary (see Özyurt 2003). The publisher's ideas seem to comply with the notion of retranslation, suggesting that aging of translations requires retranslations. Üster regards this as a "noble action" and thinks that the publisher got a "concrete response" to the translation criticism. When it comes to Tere, he highlights that publishers didn't care much for this kind of criticisms in the past as the market was big enough but the communication was weak. Nevertheless, today the publishing sector becomes smaller and the technological developments in communication force the agents to take into consideration the criticisms, which bring positive results (Ibid). Such remarks are really striking in terms of revealing readers' active role in today's publishing world, whether it be translated literature or not. The findings are further in accord with Eker Roditakis' research deducing that reviewers act as significant agents of publishing world and "their role in the reception of translated literature, (...) does definitely worth a closer look" (Eker Roditakis 2017, 8).

READERS' DISAPPOINTMENTS OF REPRINTS

Readers are generally disappointed about loose and abridged translations of Christie novels. Marketing strategies of publishing houses such as the imprecise printing and different labeling are other disappointing issues for them. More clearly, reader disappointments ensue from reprints. For instance, one significant reader criticism concerns "reprints" of previous translations; and so, targets directly Altın Kitaplar Publishing House. Opinions can be found on "Agatha Library" Christie online platform (see https://forum.kaviprihtim.com/t/agatha-christie-kitapligi-altinkitaplar/1756/17). A reader comments about reprints of the old translations and feels that translators aren't to blame but the publishing house for imprecise printing:

The translation perspective in 60s and 70s was quite different. There wasn't precision towards translation as we have in nowadays. (....) I think that, rather than translators, the publishing houses should be responsible for publishing the same translations for many years / 18. 09.2018.

In these reprints, the publishing house sometimes uses the label of "complete translation" for reprints, although they weren't retranslated by another translator or they don't have any changes in texts apart from the changes in printing. Frustrated readers express themselves as:

Periyodiknesriyat: "Today, Altın Kitaplar announced that the complete translation of *Ten Little Niggers* will come onto the market in October. I have already bought the current translation from Kitapyurdu by enjoying a reduction of 50%. I feel cheated. What is this 'full translation'? Is there anyone who can tell the difference?" / 18.09.2018

DenaroForbin: "What Altın Books does is really not nice" / 18.09.2018.

Oguzeren: "I think Altın Publishing House should renew these translations immediately. It doesn't have to be one translator. If it reprints them without renewing, at least it should use a statement indicating that they aren't complete translations. Publishing the same novel for years, and then putting a 'complete translation' label to the reprint are not good" / 18.09.2018.

Alper: "Altın Publishing House broke my confidence in terms of Christie prints a long time ago and now no matter how good translations they do, I don't want to read or buy books from them. It seems that they would tell us in the next 3-5 years that these books weren't the original

texts" / 6.04.2019 (see https://forum.kayiprihtim.com/t/agatha-christie-kitapligi-altin-kitaplar/1756/19).

Readers are aware of the fact that reprints are presented them as "complete translations" to give the impression that reprints would be renewed versions of the previous translations. According to Paloposki and Koskinen (2010, 35) "there is a potential positive charisma attached to retranslations and their marketing potential". Undoubtedly, there is also a positive charisma potential attached to reprints; and labeling them as "complete translations" creates marketing potential, too. However, readers adopt critical approaches to these reprints and they provide comparisons of the previous translations and reprints in terms of page numbers to show how they weren't deceived by them. Also, updating just the cover of the translation but not the translation itself is another concern of the readers. They share updated covers and comment on them, even making jokes such as "The cover is new, but the translation was done at least 20 years ago. If the translation would have been married, it could get a child now" / Oguzeren, 24.05.2019. All of these disappoint readers who raise their voices in such online platforms; and, consequently, they demand "complete retranslations."

It is noteworthy that Altın Kitaplar Publishing House listened to these demands and started to retranslate some of the Christie novels with the purpose of overcoming such problems. For instance, *The A.B.C. Murders* was retranslated by Çiğdem Öztekin. "The previous prints were 174 pages, but this time translation is 256 pages" (see https://kayiprihtim.com/haberler/edebiyat/cinayet-alfabesi-artik-tammetin/). This case reminds the idea of progress or development inherited by retranslation, and it certainly indicates the decisive part of readers in initiating a retranslation process.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article underlines how readers express themselves in online platforms and try to convey their demands for "complete retranslations". It also opens a discussion on the nexus between the notion of "retranslation" and readers' role as active participants of re/translation processes. That being the case, it adopts a reader-oriented stance. According to the findings presented in this study, readers in online platforms often complain about fake Christie translations and provide lists of these translations. Further to that, readers write about the confusion created by many incomplete and old Christie's translations together with reprints and retranslations on the market.

Readers inevitably re-evoke the motives behind the notion of retranslation such as "returning to the source", "incompleteness of the "aging", "progress", translations". "readers" preferences" etc. Nevertheless, some readers are irresolute when it comes to choose a Christie novel to buy, and some others are frustrated as they bought an old translation or a reprint while there is currently a retranslation in the market. Most of them report of being lost among these re/translations and reprints of the queen's murder mysteries. They make use of online platforms to get and share information on re/translations as well as to make their voice heard by publishing houses. Moreover, marketing strategies of publishing houses such as publishing reprints with an impression of a new translation by updating covers and labeling them as "complete translations" disappoint readers since they are quite aware of these strategies and aren't deceived by them. Some successful instances were mentioned in this article showing that readers could make themselves heard and so, "complete retranslations" were published. Actually, readers' demands also become a motive for retranslation processes.

Readers express their opinions, make explicit criticisms, compare translations and translators themselves at various levels and issue a call for "complete retranslations" of Christie works in online platforms. Undoubtedly, these platforms help to awakening more consciousness among readers and publishers. To conclude, today's readers are not passive, but rather active and conscious participants of re/translation processes for they are able to canalize online platforms to direct publishers.

As asserted in several studies (Işıklar Koak 2017; Eker Roditakis 2017; Işıklar Koçak, and Erkul Yağcı 2019), this approach claims that readers as reviewers and critics play a more decisive role in re/translation processes by forcing publishers to have not just formal and economic concerns but also to increase their literary concerns. Today, readers seem to be, more than ever, a strong voice in the world re/translations. Publishers obviously need to listen to readers' views and demands more often!

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