

TRANSLATION THEORY IN THE YEAR 2000 AND ITS ROLE IN THE TRANSLATION SCHOOLS¹

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The millennium, the 21st century, the impending decade, the year 2000 — the global public relations obsession with the future is quite artificial. But, as far as translation is concerned, some kind of 'mission statement', bogus as the expression may be, is now more appropriate than the literary critic's study of the various aberrations of translation in the past; and the business translator's concern with 'the real world', the present, where whatever is, is right.

On the one hand, we have the literary translation scholars' preoccupation with objective and descriptive studies, and so with conformity to the translation norms of various historical periods and cultures, or, as Hermans has it, with his opportunistic and corrupt idea that

the act of translating is a matter of adjusting and manipulating a source text so as to bring the target text in line with a particular model and hence a particular notion of correctness, so securing social acceptance, even acclaim;

and again, the pronouncement that whether a translation is good or bad is of no consequence, is a matter of taste, and tastes change all the time, as Bassnett has it; or the idea that if a translation works for a particular time and place, nothing much else matters, so Julian Hall; or that translation is rewriting, undertaken in the service of power, a patron, a sponsor, a commissioner, which was Lefevere's fixed idea and hobby horse. And on the other hand, you have the German functionalists' grovelling devotion to the customer, to empirical practice, no longer in the office but perhaps at home, on the computer, flying away by modem, e-mail and fax to the wonderful world of the world-wide web, which is the real world, the empirical world, not the world of academia, of the ivory tower, but the world of the professional, who, if he is well paid, and the customer is well satisfied — there could be no other criterion, or perhaps there could? — must have done a good job. However, just as the new British foreign secretary has suddenly and unprecedentedly put Human Rights, not the precious interests of the precious British, at the head of his mission statement for British foreign policy, perhaps something equally startling and idealistic is now

1 Inaugural Lecture, SSLMIT, University of Trieste (9 June 1997).

desirable as a programme for the translator of the future, whether she is working for the world of business and assisting in the transport of goods and the transfer of technology, or in facilitating travel and tourism, or publicizing the arts, or directly in herself disseminating imaginative literature.

A prospective, not a retrospective policy, which assumes that translation is a noble profession, and that words like 'true', 'accurate', 'faithful' and even sometimes 'literal' and 'traditional' are not dirty words, and, as Tim Parks has written in this journal (n.1, 1995), 'faithfulness is by no means a dull thing, but a dynamic process that requires infinite sensibility and resourcefulness'. Now I believe that the two central issues in translation, if we are talking of a full translation, and where we are concerned with a serious and substantial text, are the same now as they have always been, since the essence of translation, unlike its dress of language, does not date, but is permanent.

The first issue is the ancient one, free versus literal translation, which has pursued translators in so many guises, for example, sense or words, reader or author, target or source language, target or source culture, generalising or particularising, covert or overt, indirect or direct, and lately, in the unnecessary Venuti jargon, domesticating or foreignising. Certainly any teacher of translation has to take a stand on this issue. As I see it, in my correlations, and like apparently Gideon Toury (but he calls them 'laws', which are too prescriptive for me), I believe that most translation questions can be handled with correlative responses: the more, the more; the less, the less, etc. So, in this case, the more important the language of a text, the more closely it should be translated, although, ironically, where the language is most important, that is in poetry, the multiplicity of factors to be accounted for results in the translation being at least denotatively more remote, but certainly not freer than in any form of literary or non-literary writing. Thus when Pierre Leyris translates Hopkins's:

Flesh falls within sight of us, we, though our flower the same,
Wave with the meadow, forget that there must
The sour scythe cringe, and the blear share come

as:

La chair choit sous nos yeux et nous, bien que notre fleur ne soit autre,
Qu'avec le pré nous ondulations, nous oublions
Que là doit sévir l'aigre faux, survenir le soc anuiteur,

it reads/sounds like a miracle of close equivalence, though denotatively, if I ignore the obsolescence of *choit* and *anuiteur*, Leyris wrote:

Flesh falls under our eyes and we, though our flower is no other,
 though we sway with the meadow, we forget
 That the bitter scythe must run wild there, the benighting ploughshare
 arise. (My back-translation)²

But certainly — and this is the other end of my first correlation — where the language is least important and the message is all important, there is no need for close translation, provided key-terms are translated by their equivalents. Thus, in the Collins English-Italian Dictionary:

Style and register labels [...] These have been given to words that are not neutral language

Indicatori di stile e di registro. Gli indicatori di stile o registro sono stati usati per tutti i vocaboli che esulano dal linguaggio standard.

Here there is no 'close' translation required outside the key terms, but the Italian is more dignified and clarifies the sense and misuse of the English word 'neutral'. Note further the imaginative and neat *esulare*, arising from *esule* (becoming an exile) and coming to mean 'not to be a part of', 'to be outside (the scope) of', which to my knowledge is unique in European languages, and might benefit them.

The second issue in translation is, I think, relatively new, and writers on translation have not properly discussed it. It is the definition of the translator's responsibility for his translation, and it has only formally arisen since translation became a profession internationally, which I at any rate can only date from the foundation of FIT, the International Federation of Translators, in 1953.

My own concept of the translator's responsibility is that, provided that the text is sound (trustworthy, true to the facts) and well written, it should be translated as accurately and elegantly as is possible. If however, in the translator's opinion, it is not, then it is the translator's responsibility to intervene, outside or within the text as is appropriate, not subjectively and only with good reasons, in accordance with the five universal and objective medial criteria which potentially negate the eternal dualisms of translation.

These are: first, the factual criterion, which covers both language, the area of dictionaries and their associated thesauruses, terminologies and glossaries, and reality, the area of encyclopedias and their atlases, gazetteers, institutional terms, symbols, proper names, general and modern quotations. From misspellings,

2 The quotation is from George Steiner's *After Babel*, and his sensitive analysis of the great poem "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and its translation should be read.

misuse of words and faulty grammar to errors of physical fact, the translator has to eliminate all the mistakes, normally within the text. This is a relatively uncontroversial area, but many translators rely too heavily on linguistic and forget encyclopedic reference books. Secondly, there is the logical criterion, which covers the reasoning of the text's argument, its sequencing of continuation and contrast, where for instance a stressed negative is usually followed by a positive ('not *this* but *that*') or a stress by its consequence ('do *this* otherwise...'). In practice, this ensures that connectives of time, cause and enumeration are logically placed, that cohesion and coherence are secure, and that in the text and its translation, two plus two is never other than four, unless in a tone of irony or clear previous agreement that one is translating nonsense of Christian Morgenstern or Lewis Carroll, which is a higher sense.

Thirdly, there is the aesthetic criterion, the quality of the language, embodied in the principles of good writing. I take it that good writing should be closely translated, however trivial or unimportant the subject of the source language text, if it is an expressive or an informational text, simply as a matter of elementary translating principle, which is to pursue the truth of what was written, and not just to satisfy the customer nor to pursue the stylistic norms of the domain, unless one is translating advertising material. Admittedly, the more banal the topic and the less serious the language, the more excuse there is for elegant variations: if the original is poorly written, it should normally be elegantly rewritten, which is how the translator, being a writer by profession, demonstrates his art, becomes *chevronné*, proves himself, *si fa valere*. I take the model of good writing or the aesthetic criterion to be approximately the Classical and Augustan one of balance, economy, grace, clarity, lightness, nicety (paper-thin accuracy), niceness (the right word in the right place), elegance, serenity and in the case of translation a certain ingeniousness and resourcefulness. The metaphor of the close-fitting dress, often used both for good style and good translation, may be justly applied as a standard, and it is sexy in both senses of the word.

The fourth criterion of translation is the moral value, which was for long denied, or regarded as embarrassing or religious (like referring to God), or subjective, therefore unmentionable by the ideological hegemony, the intellectuals, in at least many European countries but which in the form or grammar as well as lexis immediately affects any translator, first as sexist writing ('for long, men have', 'a good man last year'), then as female or male animism, the pathetic fallacy (nature and its components, the brooks and the winds, countries, Marianne, that *belle France*, the virtues, the truth, and even the ships), and finally lexically with an occasional contemptuous diminutive neuter (*das Sau*, *das Fräulein*), in the form of bigotry, racism, colour of skin, foreignness, elitism or class and IQ, or intelligence quotient, mental and

physical deficiencies, ageism and the glorification or denigration of the young. Note that historical and authoritative texts are exempt from such moral 'correction' (the 'rights of man' still remain in modern French, and may return in other languages), and that extremist political correctness is likely to be counter-productive.

The fifth criterion is linguistic truth, the convergence of language and languages, the complementary and supplementary element that languages offer through literal translation, when the expression is not linked to a particular culture. Thus the German *sich ausschlafen* has already transferred in American English to 'be' or 'get slept out', and could become British English, more expressively, 'have you slept yourself out now?' Or again the amazing French *prendre les coordonnées*, 'take all the details', 'get her address and phone number', 'find out how to get in touch', could transfer to any language that admits grecolatinisms, 'take his co-ordinates', *prendere le sue coordinate*. Similarly, the pleasant German conceit of a return to childhood on one's birthday ('the birthday child') could be disseminated to any linguistic culture, as well as the friendly habit of addressing a mixed group of friends as 'children' (roughly 'folks!'), or *bambini* or *les enfants*, which you cannot yet do³.

I have proposed five groups of instances, all non-cultural (all in opposition to the idea that translation is a direct intercultural communication), where the translator as a responsible professional person may have to intervene between the dualisms within the source and the target language text.

I remind you that I have been attempting to give my reply to what I think are the two main issues in translation theory. I need hardly say that if, as I believe, this subject is to be the core item in the curriculum of all translation schools, studied every working week, but not for more than two hours a week from the beginning to the end of the course, then other people's translation methods or strategies also have to be fairly described, and, in respect of the second issue, the various versions of the invisibility of the translator, when there is functional equivalence, or the neutrality of the translator, where she is the notorious transparent naked glass — excuse my sexiness or sexism. I should add that other attempts to establish general dualisms in translation, e.g. between equivalence and adequacy, inevitably come to grief (up to this point Mary Snell-Hornby was right in casting doubt on the concept of equivalence) since they only fit particular examples: an adequate translation (*uno scarso filo di speranza*) of 'a thin thread/ray/glimmer of hope' would not do if an equivalent translation (*un esile filo/raggio/barlume*) were possible, as it is. Translation has to be framed within certain principles, bearing in mind the fact that if the principles

3 Though in Italian *ragazzi* (literally 'boys and girls') is very widely used exactly in that sense.

cannot be 100% attained, this does not mean they must be abandoned, as is often mistakenly assumed.

It is precisely the framework principles that literary and non-literary translation have got in common — there is nothing much else, and they are too often confused by writers on and teachers of translation. In brief and at bottom, non-literary texts and their translations are concerned with the facts and ideas of reality, are denotative and impersonal and written in the third person; literary texts and their translations are concerned with the truth and beauty of human behaviour, are connotative and personal and are expressed as much through sound as through writing, being marked by the stresses and lengths of speech-rhythms.

Subject to the framework principles there are a hundred translation topics, and these are the life and stuff of the subject. It is a pity that the memorandum *Professional Training and the Profession*, produced by a co-ordinating committee of German translators in commerce and industry and representatives of the 'leading' translator and interpreter training institutes in 1986, but recently circulated to all the leading European translation schools for comment and revision, did not go into the matter in any detail.

The occasion of the 1986 Stellbrink memorandum was a general feeling of unease in Germany that translator training was not being geared to the realities of the profession: by insisting that students must always have access to dictionaries, the committee was implicitly and rightly criticising the type of exam, based on language learning courses by teachers who know nothing about translation, where such access is not granted, but they did not mention the large number of other reference books required (which I have already emphasised). By enumerating a variety of types of SL to TL text transfers (summaries, notes, partial translations, versions with different purposes etc.; they should have added: for different and less knowledgeable readerships), they implicitly criticised a monotonous surfeit of texts of similar type (which, in Britain, often omit titles, sources and dates, etc.). By mentioning deficiencies in passive 'knowledge' of source language, they implicitly criticised the poor spelling, scant vocabulary and clumsy sentence structures of many students, but they failed to stress that a translator must actively master — and not simply 'know' — several registers of her target language elegantly and at native language standard.

However, the main deficiencies of the document go beyond these particulars, and are clearer now that national economies have moved so far from the primary and secondary to the tertiary or services sectors, and more explicitly encompass political and social fields as well as the economic sectors. The memorandum ignored travel and tourism, which are now the dominating factors in many regions and many countries, and which are both unthinkable without translation. Flight magazines, train magazines, museum and art exhibition leaflets and guides, language phrase books, public building notices, frontier traffic signs,

hotel brochures, menus etc., all these and more have through translation transformed the face of many towns. Half the art galleries of Europe still need the titles of their paintings properly translated, and many public relations departments, not least Trieste, need to formulate and practice both active and proactive translation policies.

Moreover, the memorandum is particularly inadequate in ignoring the requirement for translators and interpreters in the public sector, notably the courts, the police stations, the social services and the hospitals. This is the age of politically enforced (ethnic cleansing) and economic migrations, of refugees, of immigration officials, of minorities striving to achieve recognition and status. And often the disabled and disadvantaged of every kind have a new language to contend with. In most countries there are more community than conference interpreters; there is a greater need for them, and only in recent years have they received organised training. Note that translation should not become the plaything of market forces, which are merely the forces of demand in the social or the economic sectors, since translation is often an 'invisible' asset in the economic sense, and has to be considered proactively, on the basis of human need, where supply has to be assessed and judiciously and prudently stimulated, and will not come automatically in response to demand. On the other hand, like some minority languages, it must not become the plaything of cranks and even fanatics and terrorists (I am thinking of ETA) to stir up society in a disruptive and financially wasteful manner. Like all initially justified extremist movements — you have only to think of political correctness or P.C. — this can soon become counter-productive.

In 1990, Ann Corsellis, the Community Interpreter Project Co-ordinator for the Institute of Linguists in the U.K., wrote that by the year 2000, 30% of the population of urban Europe under 35 years old would not have been born in the country where they were living. Careful study will have to be made of the many translating and interpreting difficulties that arise from contacts between, on the one hand, immigrants with imperfect knowledge of the new language and its culture and with inadequate education, and on the other, public service representatives: nurses, doctors, the police, judges, legal assistance officials, teachers, local government officials, citizens advice bureaux and tourist offices. Statements constituting legal evidence will have to be translated and explained in detail; medical and related material require particular attention to key-terms: 'familiar' and 'familial' have different meanings, though both may be translated as *familiare*, if the context is distinguished; but the ordinary language and the grammatical structures can often be varied and elegantly transposed provided the technical terms are regarded as 'sacred', which may mean transferring them, offering an approximate cultural equivalent, and describing them with a non-

cultural classifier and a particularising adjective, say 'health centre', *poliambulatorio, centro sociale e medicale*.

In these areas, community translators and interpreters may have concurrently to pursue studies in psychiatry, criminology and forensic medicine. Seen in the cool literal light of another language, the so-called power relationships between practitioners (officials and professionals) and their lay clients, the ignorant public, are more clearly exposed; at present this is a field wide open to feminists, post-colonialists, Marxists, conspiracy theorists, ideologists, deconstructionists, power theory maniacs, and prone to distorted and exaggerated interpretations: health visitors domesticating and indoctrinating the various underclasses.

Whilst the German memorandum, from whose committee representatives of the social services were conspicuously absent, rightly emphasised the need for flexibility in dealing with translation tasks, it addressed itself only to business and government translators; it showed no trace of awareness of the difficulties say of Turkish and Yugoslav 'guest workers' in the country at the time.

I am suggesting that in the future, whilst translation theory courses are run overarched by certain broad principles as well as comparative linguistic distinctions and contrasts between the two or three languages concerned, there are perhaps two to three hundred topics linking translation to job specialisms from which course organisers will have to select, each year, a limited number. Thus, in the case of cultural tourism, a neglected field of translation theory, where non-literary translation is frequently interspersed by say translation of titles of works of art, libretti of operas, song-texts, extracts from literary works, therefore the separate field of literary translation, much has to be written, not to produce the kind of homogeneous outlook recommended by the German functionalists such as Hans Hönl, which would ignore the valuable local requirements and cultures of each translation school, but at least to narrow differences in translation theory, perhaps to discourage the monolingual cultural imperialist outlook of the Prado, the Uffizi and the National Gallery; to correct the continually irritating misprints of punctuation and capitalisation; to accept that smoothness but not preposterous hyperbole should be a primary feature of translated brochures: *Montpellier est une ville où la modernité du présent se conjugue avec un passé prestigieux*, 'Montpellier is a city which combines the attractions of its rich (not prestigious) past with all the advantages of modern living (not the modernity of the present)'; and what to do about the classical hotel notices with their saucy puns, 'We hope to ensure that all our guests get laid in their beds in maximum comfort' (yes, I invented that one, as I mislaid the list sent to me by a Viennese student of mine, himself the image of Schnitzler's Anatol). I am suggesting that notices like: 'We take your bags and send them in all directions'

and 'Ladies are requested not to have children in the bar' are amongst the treasures of (mis)translation.

So I close by emphasising that translation schools have not only to be open to new trends and technologies, but to reopen fields that have never been properly investigated. There is an excellent essay on radio monitoring for Caversham Park, Reading, by G.M. Schatunowski, *Translation Guide for Russian Monitors* (many lovely examples, perfectly comprehensible to non-Russianists like me), but I can't leave the following passage, which Sergio Viaggio and many others would applaud, unchallenged:

Predilection for literalisms among monitors stems [...] from inexperience, the irrational fear of departing from the original, misplaced preoccupation with [...] spurious accuracy [...] Literalisms should be avoided not [...] because they offend good taste and violate the established norms and usage of English but [...] because over-literary [sic] renderings [...] lead to a distortion of the original. (The three dots between square brackets stand for superfluous clichés)

All this is half-true, but predilection for literalism may also stem from the search for truth, for what the original states, and for the struggle for concision. In *Assigned to Listen* edited by Margaret Renier, which I have not yet read, I understand that the great art critic Ernst Gombrich, himself (like Erich Fried and Ewald Osers) a former monitor and the glory of Caversham Park, protests at the way that during the War the English revisors were continually naturalising and smoothing his close translations of the revolting barbarisms of the German war leaders and propagandists. (Note that at Caversham, much translation has always been done *out of* the home language. Oh, what a sin.)

Many translation theorists are now looking at TV and cinema sub-titling and dubbing, and it is time they got down to opera and play surtitles too. Perhaps the early 19th century fancy that a translator is licensed to change literary titles to anything he pleases will one day be eliminated.

The upheaval in lexicography precipitated by corpus-based dictionaries should ensure more accurately based translation, but translators and linguists will be needed to distinguish literary/colloquial words from report-type words, obsolete from obsolescent words, key-words from casual words, all of which may be in denial of the concept of word frequency. Further there is more work to be done on the significance of sound, notably onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, and the balance of word-groups, clauses and sentences, more salient in literature than in non-literature, and particularly in poetry, proverbs and aphorisms. Note also that translation schools should be preparing guide-lines for the field of 'minimal translation' (the term is Pal Heltai's, but I have developed it beyond his concept), where for the sake of concision, because the message is so much more important

than the meaning, and time is of the essence, a simple positive or negative is a perfectly adequate and indeed appropriate 'translation' of a longish text; further, in all translation curricula, literary and non-literary translation theory should be contrasted; linguistics is an essential component and aspect of each of them, and should not be taught as a separate subject.

Finally, I should warn that this subject of translation theory, central as it is going to be to any translation curriculum, is not going to provide any easy answers to translation difficulties and dilemmas. It is a framework of reference: itself metaphorically an encyclopedia and a dictionary, it will sensitise the translator to many factors that may have escaped her; it is a body of knowledge and of case-histories, none of which will go out of date. Whilst technology will offer new translation channels, and science new translation topics, there will be no obsolete aspects of translation theory, it cannot be divided into 'traditional' and 'modern'. As long as it sticks with examples like Antaeus to the earth, it will be useful and refreshing, even/particularly when its implications are rejected. It will remain the reflection of a paradox.