

# Notes on Sergio Viaggio

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I found Sergio Viaggio's article *Contesting Peter Newmark* in the first issue of *R.I.T.T.* diffuse and verbose, and hope to reply succinctly. I am not worth such a long and often tedious space.

I have written more than Viaggio credits me with: *About Translation* (Multilingual Matters Ltd. 1991); twenty *Paragraphs on Translation* in *The Linguist*; many other pieces in magazines and journals, notably *The Curse of Dogma in Translation in Lebende Sprachen* and *Truth and Culture in Translation* (S.O.A.S., University of London, forthcoming).

Viaggio quotes me as separately saying in *Approaches to Translation* (1981) and *A Textbook of Translation* (1988):

*Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language.*

*What is Translation? Often, though not by any means always, it is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text.*

and then adds:

*Presumably, the latter definition supersedes the former.* (R.I.T.T. O: 27).

Well, the second definition does not 'supersede' the first, and there is a constant within both.

Viaggio then poses a series of questions:

*What are the criteria used to evaluate ... success? What ... qualifies as 'the same message and/or statement in another language'* (R.I.T.T. O: 27)

and suggests that I do not address them. I frequently 'address' the questions mentioned in his

article until he wanders off to libretti and dubbing, which I refer to (though I don't 'address' them) in *Paragraphs*.

Viaggio says I refuse to distinguish linguistic, semantic meaning from extra-linguistic sense. But I frequently distinguish the linguistic from the referential, the dictionary from the encyclopaedia, etc. Viaggio later makes a false distinction between 'sense' and 'meaning' (p. 45, p. 49 and p. 48 in a sentence full of bluster), which he confuses with the distinction between 'sense' and 'reference' (Frege) which I maintain throughout my writing. Viaggio's '*this crucial of all crucial*', '*my humble self*', '*total bondage*', etc. does not help.

Viaggio then challenges my remarks on SVO word order (1988 p. 14), i.e., *the natural word order of a sentence ... which follows the natural order of thought*, though I have explained my theory that non-SVO order was artificially imposed by clerisies.

Viaggio attacks my example '*I love you*', which was used primarily to illustrate that there is no rigid division between text categories (expressive, informative, vocative); the context is 'typical' (a love declaration) and I find Viaggio's paragraph on other contexts and variations (82 possible translations into Spanish) irrelevant.

In reply to the following:

*When Newmark all but plunges from defining translation to legislating on how to translate an isolated sentence, he is simply trampling underfoot the last thirty or so years of translatology and paying his students the utmost disservice. Of course, Newmark might say that he is not advocating any specific literal translation, just the literal approach.* (R.I.T.T. p. 29)

I do not 'legislate' and Viaggio appears to be writing to himself. I nowhere advocate the 'literal

approach' as such; it is not an expression I use. My approach depends on the importance of the language of the SL text and sometimes on the quality of its writing.

Viaggio says, referring to my writings:

*Free translation gets all the invectives, whereas literal translation will systematically be preferred.* (R.I.T.T. p. 30)

A nonsense. Most of my writing and translation examples are devoted to cases where literal translation is not to be preferred and is not possible.

Viaggio says I 'repeat again and again' (I hope not) such ideas as *'there is no exclusively semantic or solely communicative way of translating'*, adding that *'my disclaimers are too weak for my claims'*, but he still does not understand me, nor does he read me properly.

Again he attacks my so-called *'plea for literalism'*:

*... in communicative as in semantic translation, provided that equivalent-effect is secured, the literal word-for-word translation is not only the best, it is the only valid method of translation* (1981 p.39)

but as so often, he ignores my proviso.

He says I fail to see the difference between accuracy and adequacy. In fact I usually avoid the term *'adequacy'*, as it is ambiguous and has a different meaning in German. On the same page he says I am *'shackled to meaning'*. Correct. That's what translation is about (his column two is all abstract platitudes).

On page 33, Viaggio's attempt to correct my punctuation in the sentence

*That particular sentence ... must be translated literally, since literal translation is always best provided it has the same communicative and semantic effect*

is misplaced.

*No serious linguist has ever questioned the primacy of speech*

asserts Viaggio on page 34. The great linguist Henry Sweet denied the priority of speech. So does Derrida. Who knows whether people drew before

they mumbled? (I don't want to know whether Viaggio likes writing, but I wish he'd learn how, viz. to condense (Pound's *dichten*).

I discussed *'mental speech'* so I don't know why Viaggio brings it up, claiming that

*the two capital works of Western literature were never written.* (R.I.T.T. p. 36)

The version of Homer we read is the written version; we know nothing of the previous oral versions.

On page 36 my six correlative statements (see Paragraphs) is a continuous attempt to produce a comprehensive theory of translation. But I am more interested in the particulars.

Viaggio goes on to claim, asserting that Seleskovitch's interpretative theory of translation is as sound as hard rock, that words are secondary, subordinate, vehicular, a means to an end. Words are not *'secondary'*, they are all we have. Viaggio, like Seleskovitch (but she writes better) continually confuses translation with interpretation. Interpretation (i.e., spoken to spoken) could not be the basis of a theory of literary translation.

Viaggio quotes me from *Approaches* (p. 147):

*A lexical item repeated in the same or following sentence of the SL text must be correspondingly repeated in the TL text, unless the original is poorly or loosely written. It should not be rendered the second time by a synonym or a 'kenning' (periphrastic expression used to replace a simple name).*

His comment is:

*This is, unquestionably, the most dogmatic statement about translation ever published.* (R.I.T.T. p. 37)

This is not a statement about translation at all, but an attempt to give a hint about repeated words.

Viaggio finds my commitment to moral universals *'bewildering'*, rewardable by a *'kick in the buttocks'* (p. 38). Although he is employed by the United Nations, he does not seem to take the UN Declaration on Human Rights seriously. I think it is time he did. That is what I meant by *'moral universals'* (I have written more since).

Viaggio (p. 38) harps on about my 'last book' (why?). I go on writing.

I disagree with Viaggio's statement on page 39 that '*the student must be taught to mistrust intuitions or automatisms*'.

After quoting me at length, Viaggio complains (p. 39):

*Not a word about the situation as actualiser of sense, nary a word about sense itself.*

As I so frequently refer to the 'situation' and the 'sense', I don't know what Viaggio is on about.

On the subject of deverbalising, Viaggio says (p. 41):

*Well, I am an interpreter, and deverbalising is exactly what I try to do.*

He has to; unlike the translator, he does not see the SLT again.

Viaggio's faith in 'translatology' is pathetic. He says on page 31:

*Until translatology develops any further, there is, that I know of, one and only one universally apt method of translating. Newmark vigorously denies this in theory and in class ...*

What is he on about? Has he seen me teaching?

This is verbiage. Platitudes follow again.

I find Viaggio's attempt to bludgeon me (p. 44) with a string of translato-logists (i.e., practitioners, *sic*), including his modest self, rather silly. Great translators like George, Campbell, Mayor, had no prejudice against literal translation, nor had Nabokov (too much the contrary) nor Benjamin, nor Darbelnet, nor have Maillot, Wilss, Vinay, Sussex and I don't know what Mossop is doing in Viaggio's *galère*.

Viaggio states on page 44:

*I do not know of any theorist who believes that everything is translatable.*

My response is that I think most '*theorists*' believe that everything is translatable, '*more or less*'. (Catford).

Page 50 consists mostly of chatter, but it is also distortion. I never wrote that Shakespeare addressed his sonnets to himself, and Viaggio's '*implication*' that a communicative would be better than a semantic translation of Hamlet merely shows how he fails to understand me.

To write more would be superfluous. Viaggio is gregarious and social, and I am not. I try to write what I think and feel, and I mistrust the crowds and majorities Viaggio espouses. I would like to meet Viaggio, but would I get a word in? I doubt it.