

# TRANSLATORS INTO THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE: CHARLATANS OR PROFESSIONALS?

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*The qualification of a translator worth reading must be a mastery of the language he translates out of, and that he translates into; but if a deficiency be to be allowed in either, it is in the original, since if he be but master enough of the tongue of his author as to be master of his sense, it is possible for him to express that sense with eloquence in his own, if he have a thorough command of that. But without the latter he can never arrive at the useful and the delightful, without which reading is a penance and fatigue. (John Dryden)<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

The paucity of research in the area of applied Translation Studies (TS), in particular translation training, is especially noticeable in the context of translation into the foreign language or L2.<sup>2</sup> This is partly because translation into L2 as a professional activity is outlawed by some renowned authorities in the field. Such a state of affairs can scarcely be reconciled with the fact that courses into L2 are often standard practice in vocational translation schools and in university departments offering translation programmes. If we wish to accept that a training course into L2 is a *bona fide* component of a language or translation curriculum, then this automatically raises the question of the aims and content of such a course – particularly in view of the exponential increase over the last few years in the range and power of teaching resources available – and what type of trainers are best qualified to teach them. The current *modus*

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1 John Dryden [1680], "On translation", in Schulte & Biguenet (1992: 30).

2 By L2 is intended a translator's foreign language, or one of his/her foreign languages, while L1 is the translator's mother tongue. This is worth underlining, in that very occasionally in the literature the abbreviations L1 and L2 have been used to represent the source language and target language respectively (even in very recent contributions, e.g. Ivir 1996), though by far the most common convention is to abbreviate the latter pair to SL and TL. The terms Language A and Language B are also used to represent mother tongue and foreign language respectively, perhaps above all in the literature on interpreting.

*operandi* of many translation schools may also be considered within the historical perspective of the time-honoured topic of SL / TL prioritisation.

With these issues in mind my intention in what follows is to assess the state of the art in TS with regard to translation into L2, on both a professional and a didactic level, to offer some personal reflections on the subject, and hopefully to scatter the seeds, advertently or inadvertently, of future research projects.

### 1. Some recent developments in TS

Translation research is undoubtedly turning the corner. The traditional snubbing of applied TS in favour of descriptive and theoretical TS<sup>3</sup> is less earnest than it once was – recent contributions to the discipline would appear to be inflicting ever more enduring dents in the armour of a literary, academic, and at times ponderously theoretical tradition. The familiar cry that studies on translation are of no use to translators, translation trainers or students – indeed of no use to anyone except fellow academics – is not as vociferous as it used to be, though protests persist. Wilss (1996: 3) laments that

those who report on activities in the field of TS must wade through the masses of often pretentious, glutinous, heavily metaphorical or extremely abstract prose, seeking the flash of insight, the buried diamond of evaluation.

In a similar vein, but with particular reference to literary translation theory, Tim Parks (1995: 33) observes that

in academic circles the art of literary translation has been at once mysticised and politicised to the extent that a professional translator eager for enlightenment as to the exact nature of his task would be ill-advised, one suspects, to spend much time reading the would-be appropriate literature on the subject.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as Snell-Hornby (1995: 47) notes, "practising translators ... usually tend to be sceptical of any kind of theorising", and indeed it must be acknowledged that even contributions of a more applied, practical nature<sup>4</sup> often have a hyper-prescriptive and generally uninviting flavour, reading more like an instruction manual than anything else. Also off-putting is a certain degree of overlap from one author to the next, a perhaps inevitable corollary of

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3 The tripartite distinction suggested by Holmes (1988: 77).

4 See Ulrych (1997: 228-229), for comments on some of the standard-bearers of applied TS.

the massive quantity of literature being produced in the field nowadays.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the recent shift away from theorising, abstract prose is undeniable. Emblematic of this is the fact that TS is now peppered with pressing appeals for more empirical, 'useful' approaches. According to Wilss (1996: 192),

One lesson we may learn from modern TS is that in order to be more than marginally useful – and this is the main crux of the matter – TS must finally be bent to the practical purpose of translation.

A sharper focus on vocational translation studies, or better, studies which respond more realistically to the demands of the translation market itself, is also reflected in formal requests for more attention to non-literary translation. In her preface to the 1996 *Rivista Internazionale di Tecnica della Traduzione*, Scarpa (1996: 1-2) makes the plea:

in the next and following issues we would like to create a greater balance between articles dealing with literary and non-literary translation, giving more emphasis to the latter, thus reflecting the overwhelming majority of translation activity in the world that is currently of a specialised nature.

Scarpa's entreaty echoes the RITT's original aims, voiced upon its inception by Dodds (1992: 1), who emphasises that "literary translation probably represents less than 10% of the translation work currently going on in Europe and the rest of the world".<sup>6</sup> Yet such is the enduring strength of the literary tradition that it frequently holds pride of place even in the applied field. A conspicuous example regards translation workbooks for students, proposing texts to be translated with accompanying annotations and/or 'ideal' renderings (e.g. for Italian-English: Brownlees & Denton (1988), Falinski (1990), and Wardle (1996)). These persist in including a substantial if not overwhelming percentage of literary (and journalistic) texts. Now while one accepts that such workbooks are not necessarily conceived with vocational objectives in mind (especially true if we consider that works such as Brownlees & Denton and Falinski are designed for Italian students working into English – in my experience Italian translators into L2 are only rarely required to deal with literary or journalistic texts), but simply as one way among many of improving foreign language skills, their marked predilection for literary texts nevertheless remains unexplained.

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5 Gile (1995a: 262) bemoans the repetitiveness of TS literature, "with the same authors explaining a limited number of basic ideas which have not changed much over the past twenty years".

6 See Ulrych (1996: 255) and Venuti (1995: 41) for further statistics.

Notwithstanding the literary tradition's continuing predominance, recent trends suggest that appeals such as Scarpa's cited above have not fallen upon deaf ears. Contributions on how to deal with non-literary texts are assuredly more prolific than they were just a few years ago, even if there is perhaps still too much focus on the product rather than the process. At this point the next logical step for applied TS is to contemplate just how all this can be carried over into the translation classroom, since, as pointed out above, one of the most glaring *lacunae* in TS is the negligible attention given to didactic issues. Here too there is no shortage of appeals for a change of direction. As Mauriello (1992: 63) rightly observes:

There is plenty of good literature on the theory of translation, but very little, as far as I know, on the practice of translation and on how to teach it. Most works deal with the final result of the translation process, i.e. they tell you how a good translation should be. However, for the purpose of translation teaching and learning, it is not much use being confronted with a 'model', a very well translated passage, without being told the ways, the road to follow, to achieve such results.

Despite eminent exceptions such as Pym, Gile, and a handful of others, the vast majority of works on translation, even those with a determinedly practical orientation, offer very little in the way of didactic methodology or even the odd teaching idea. Particularly welcome would be some advice on how some of the less abstruse aspects of translation theory could be tailored to the needs of the classroom. For example, the translation procedures outlined by Vinay & Darbelnet (1969: 46-55) and later by Newmark (1981: 30-31) are illuminating and well-known, but there exists precious little advice as to how they might purposefully be 'translated' into classroom activities. Some advice would also be welcome on how best to integrate into the translation classroom the formidable resources afforded by modern technology (lexical data bases, different types of corpora, etc.) The negative repercussions deriving from this state of affairs for specialised translation schools and university departments clearly speak for themselves.

## 2. Translation into L1 v. translation into L2: contributions in the literature

Recuerden ustedes lo que les pasa cuando tienen que hablar en una lengua extraña. ¡Qué tristeza! (Ortega y Gasset 1983: 443)

Striking evidence of the scarcity of practical, concrete applications in TS is the generally hazy distinction between the activity of translating into L1 and L2

respectively. Indeed there is rarely any distinction at all. Only very recently Marmaridou (1996: 57) had cause to lament that "the type of directionality involved in translating from or into the translator's mother tongue has not featured as an issue in translation studies". This indifference to the characteristics or skills of the actual performer of the translation is actually rather startling if we consider the increased emphasis of modern communicative approaches on situational factors such as context, sender, receiver, purpose etc. Fully in keeping with the traditional lack of prestige associated with the profession, and belying recent and much-acclaimed theories espousing the translator's 'visibility',<sup>7</sup> the translators themselves are, apparently, missing in action, if not buried without trace. Fortunately the indifference is not total. Wilss (1996: 8) stresses the need to come to grips with the all-important issue of directionality in translation studies:

It is necessary to distinguish between foreign language to native tongue translation activities, which predominate in translation practice, and native tongue to foreign language translation, which is gaining ground in the translation profession.

The reason that explicit distinctions such as this occur so rarely in TS is no doubt related once again to the weight of the preponderantly literary tradition. It has usually been assumed axiomatically that (literary) translators should work into their native language, and it may well be that this assumed coincidence of TL and L1 has carried over into much modern translation research, literary or otherwise.<sup>8</sup> Another perhaps powerful factor is that some official translation bodies, as well as a handful of major translation theorists, actively discourage translation away from the mother tongue. Remarks on the subject, some of which are reproduced below, certainly make interesting reading.

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7 See Bassnett (1996: 22): "Now in the 1990s ... the key word [in TS] is 'visibility'. The role of the translator can be reassessed in terms of analysing the intervention of the translator in the process of linguistic transfer".

8 Beeby Lonsdale (1998: 64-65) notes, however, that "at the beginning of the Christian era, directionality was not an issue in Europe since most translations were into Latin, the language of officialdom, religion and learning. It was only with the rise of the nation states, the Reformation and the development of the vernaculars that the idea of the superiority of direct translation appeared". See also Kelly (1979).

## 2.1 Translation into L2: the prosecution

Baker (1992: 81) cites the prescriptions of the Code of Professional Conduct of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting:

a member shall translate only into a language in which he has mother-tongue or equivalent competence (art. 4.1).

A similar recommendation is made by the British Translators' Guild in their set of guidelines entitled 'You and Your Translator':

Above all, never ask a translator to translate from his/her own language (see Congrat-Butler 1979: 69).

The point was also stressed in UNESCO's 1976 Nairobi Declaration, which set out a list of 'Recommendations on the legal protection of translators and translations and the practical means to improve the status of translators':

A translator should, as far as possible, translate into his own mother tongue or into a language of which he or she has a mastery equal to that of his or her mother tongue (cited in Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 42).

The reasoning behind these norms evidently concerns the quality of the final product. Some comments by translation scholars:

real-life translators do not normally translate into their foreign language for the obvious reason that even very advanced and proficient language learners with a wide vocabulary still make mistakes in grammar and syntax (Klein-Braley 1996: 20).

Newmark (1981: 180) captures the issue more precisely when he observes that the difficulties in translating to L2 are not so much grammatical as collocational:

A foreigner appears to go on making collocational mistakes however long he lives in his adopted country [...] An educated native will also make mistakes in collocation, but he will correct himself intuitively [...] For the above reasons, translators rightly translate into their own language.

According to Baker (1992: 64) this lack of collocational sensitivity on the part of non-native speakers "lends support to the argument that translators should only work into their language of habitual use or mother tongue".

Reflecting upon his long experience as a translator in Sweden, Samuelsson-Brown (1993: 13), a native English speaker, reaches more or less the same conclusion, confessing that he would

shy clear of submitting a translation into Swedish unless it was to be used purely for information purposes. Yes, you may be able to translate quite correctly into a foreign language but it will eventually become evident that the translation was not written by a 'native'.

Some of the above assertions appear to leave the door ajar concerning the question of the mother tongue: the sop extended to non-native speakers is that they are eligible for translation into L2 if they possess mother-tongue equivalence or if the TL is their language of habitual use. Other scholars are rather more categorical. Delisle (1988: 21) quotes, and agrees with, Grandjouan (1971: 227), for whom translation consists in: "DIRE BIEN (PAR ÉCRIT) DANS UNE LANGUE QU'ON SAIT TRÈS BIEN, CE QU'ON A TRÈS BIEN COMPRIS DANS UNE LANGUE QU'ON SAIT BIEN" (upper case in original). For Delisle "the translator can thus dispense with an oral knowledge of the original message, as long as he fully understands it in its written form". Both authors are patently working on the assumption that translators should work into the mother tongue. Finally, Gile (1995a: 13) stresses that in training programmes, one of the questions that should be answered from very early on is "Why should one translate only into one's native tongue?", while Ladmiral (1979: 12) offers the peremptory recommendation: "On traduit dans sa langue!".

It may be noted in passing is that the above prescriptions, or more precisely the cultural background of those doing the prescribing, would lend credence to the idea that insistence on direct translation is a feature of large, predominantly monolingual nations (see Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997: 41), thus lending weight to Venuti's (1995) notions of linguistic imperialism and domesticating translation.<sup>9</sup>

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9 It should be recalled that in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the preferred direction of translation for *interpreting* is into the foreign tongue (see for example Denissenko 1989). On a more general level, it seems to me highly revealing that there are very few major, 'authoritative' objections to interpreting into L2. Observations on the subject include the following: a research article by Gran & Fabbro (1988) on cerebral lateralisation, albeit restricted to an analysis of isolated phrases and proverbs, identifies greater fatigue in interpreting from L1. Seleskovitch & Lederer (1989: 121-123, 134-137) concede, with some reservations, the acceptability of *consecutive* interpreting into L2, though they advocate that simultaneous interpreting be practised and taught only into L1. Snelling (1992: 6) asserts that "interpreters in a perfect world should work [only] from C languages into A", but that in practice this is hardly feasible,

## 2.2 Translation into L2: the defence

Notwithstanding the above, comments on the issue of directionality in translation studies are the exception rather than the rule. Most translation theorists do not go into the thorny question of precisely who does the translation work, apparently presupposing the existence of an ideal translator working into his/her own language. One therefore tends to assume that the above views represent the conventional wisdom: translation into L2 is to be proscribed, it is a deviation from the norm – when all is said and done, something of an embarrassment. We need only consider the disparaging connotations of terms used in the literature to describe this activity: 'indirect translation', 'inverse translation', 'marked translation', 'pedagogical translation' (i.e. an exclusively academic exercise) and, perhaps the least forgiving of all, 'service translation'.

This translation zeitgeist seems to have infected students of translation schools too. Not long ago, after a serious rush of blood to the head, I recited the 'official' mantras quoted above to a class of third year students at the Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori in Forlì, hoping to provoke a scandal, only to discover that several appeared to be already all but resigned to the idea! (Some were slightly less defeatist, stating that they felt especially uneasy translating into their second (i.e. second-best) foreign language, which in the case of this particular group was English).

Of course it goes without saying that societies, associations, guilds or whatever are at liberty to create whatever rules they choose for their own members, but the apparent intransigence of the statements quoted above on the part of both translation scholars and official organisations – particularly the latter, whose influence spreads so far and wide – are probably most disheartening for would-be L2 translators. They also seem misguided, blithely ignoring a number of pressing realities. The most immediate objections are the following:

- (i) the vision of such statements is myopic. All over the world translators can and do translate into languages other than their own, in accordance with the

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except perhaps for interpreters whose mother tongue is one of the major languages of international communication. In any case Snelling identifies as his target readership those training in the use of English as an active B language (Snelling 1992: 1-2, 13-14). Finally, Gile (1995b: 179-180) holds that opposition to training in simultaneous interpreting towards the foreign language is not based upon scientific observation. He also stresses that no Western author has addressed the need for a methodology of interpreting towards L2.

I am extremely grateful to my colleague Peter Mead for bringing the above comments to my attention.



demands of the contemporary translation market. With regard to the situation in Italy, Brady (1992: 101) underscores

le esigenze del mercato italiano della traduzione, dove ai traduttori italiani viene richiesto con inesorabile frequenza di tradurre dalla propria lingua verso l'inglese.

In the same way Harvey (1996: 59), while supporting the notion that L1 and TL should ideally be one and the same, asserts that in the French context such stipulations must yield to more pragmatic considerations:

With the ever-increasing demand for texts written in English, particularly in the fields of science, technology and medicine, many prospective translators will have difficulty making a living if they are not prepared to correct and/or translate texts intended for English-speaking readers. Many clients are simply not aware of the difficulty of translating into L2, or are in too much of a hurry to find a suitably-qualified native speaker.

At a recent conference in Italy, many German colleagues confirmed that a similar situation obtains in Germany. If we then go on to consider so-called 'minor' languages, we find that any sort of all-embracing, doctrinaire legislation regarding directionality of translation is misplaced. McAlester (1992) supplies data from surveys reporting on the situation in Finland, and concludes that translation into L2 is a matter of economic necessity:

It is a fact that translation out of a minor language like Finnish into major languages is important both in terms of national cultural identity and economic survival. However, the volume of work exceeds the number of available translators who are major language speakers (McAlester 1992: 292).

Pym (1992b: 78) links the current demands of the translation market to the labour market in general. Refuting Ladmiral's (1979: 12) assertion that "il n'est pas certain que cette volonté de rentabilisation polyvalente du traducteur (de la traductrice) 'a tout faire' soit véritablement réaliste et linguistiquement praticable sur une échelle assez étendue", Pym points out that

it is widely recognised that the volatility of international relations and technological change at the end of the twentieth century is increasingly penalising rigid labour markets, demanding greater flexibility and adaptability of all professionals, including translators.

It is no longer enough to translate in one direction well, nor indeed to specialise in one particular field.

Of course the needs of the translation market can vary considerably from one place to the next. During my eight years as a professional translator in Italy, for example, I have only very rarely been asked to work into Italian, though I have run across plenty of Italians who regularly translate into English. The considerable risk of over-generalising in this regard is illustrated by comparing Dollerup's (1996: 26-27) assertion of "the real-life fact that most translators actually have to work in at least two directions" with Klein-Braley's (1996: 20) diametrically opposite declaration cited earlier that "real-life translators do not normally translate into their foreign language". One can only assume that Klein-Braley and Dollerup conduct very different real lives.<sup>10</sup>

- (ii) such statements give the impression that there is no possible distinction of text types. While most expressive texts and some vocative texts<sup>11</sup> (the frantic search for the *mot juste* in the language of advertising is especially frustrating when translating into L2) may well be beyond the reach of a non-native speaker, informative texts are assuredly more approachable. Crystal (1987: 344) takes the argument a step further:

On the whole, translators work into their mother tongue (or language of habitual use), to ensure a result that sounds as natural as possible – though some translators have argued that, for certain types of text (e.g. scientific material) where translation accuracy is more crucial than naturalness, it makes more sense for translators to be more fluent in the source language.

The latter point is clearly debatable, but encourages reflection upon the crucial question of the actual needs of the translation market. Brady (1992: 102) reminds us that

il pane quotidiano del traduttore è dato da testi sulle ricerche di mercato, relazioni annuali di aziende, materiale pubblicitario e di

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10 It would in any case be a relief to know once and for all who 'real-life' or 'real-world' translators, typical buzz words of recent translation literature, are actually being contrasted with. Potential translators? Dead translators? False or imagined translators? Or, as seems admittedly more plausible, student translators, non-professional translators, or professionals in different fields whose work partly or occasionally involves translation?

11 The terminology is Newmark's (1981: 13), who distinguishes expressive (e.g., literary), vocative (e.g., advertising) and informative texts.

pubbliche relazioni, atti di congressi scientifici, articoli di ricerca scientifica o tecnica e manuali e cataloghi tecnici.

- (iii) those who discountenance translation into L2, or veto it altogether, appear to work on the assumption that the native speaker is the god of translation. Aside from the fact that corpus linguistics is now demonstrating the sometimes embarrassing unreliability of native speakers' intuitions,<sup>12</sup> such an assumption glosses over the following aspect (let us imagine a native English speaker translating from Italian into English): whatever degree of competence our translator possesses in Italian, when it comes to decoding the ST s/he will almost always be less sensitive to its nuances and subtleties than an Italian translator would be. This point is captured by Snell-Hornby (1995: 81):

Based on the frame of the text, the translator-reader builds up his own scenes<sup>13</sup> depending on his own level of experience and his internalised knowledge of the material concerned. As a non-native speaker, the translator might well activate scenes that diverge from the author's intentions or deviate from those activated by a native speaker of the source language (a frequent cause of translation error).

This view is shared by Malmkær (1993: 227):

An SL native language translator is more likely to share the author's interpretations of ST linguistic choices than a TL native language translator: s/he will be more sensitive to their significance, and will therefore, obviously, be more likely to reproduce them in TT.

Also worth recording is Malmkær's contention that even when translators working into the mother tongue *do* possess this sensitivity to the fine shades of meaning of the original, their natural affinity towards the TT may cause them to "feel less regret in letting go of SL characteristics in the interest of TL naturalness" (Malmkær 1993: 225).

The point is that the imperious insistence upon TL native speakers, based as it would appear to be on anxiety about the TT containing too many unnatural SL elements, pays no heed to the fact that mother tongue interference can operate *in both directions*. While there is no denying that

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12 Sinclair (1991: 39) maintains that "actual usage plays a very minor role in one's consciousness of language", a view supported by Malmkær (1993: 225): "There is often a conflict between native speaker intuitions and textual evidence".

13 The terminology is borrowed from Fillmore's (1977) theory of scenes and frames.

our native English speaker may well produce stilted, unidiomatic usage when working into Italian (SL interference), it is equally true that when translating into English s/he may in some way impose or map his/her mother tongue linguistic structures and patterns onto the (Italian) SL. That is, a native speaker's understanding of the foreign language ST may be disturbed or distorted by his/her conceptual patterns in the mother tongue (TL interference). (With this I do not intend to espouse the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, according to which we are to all intents and purposes 'trapped' by our (native) language, but I believe that translators are unavoidably influenced by such aspects as linguistic paradigms, conceptual fields etc., particularly of their own language. See Marmaridou (1996: 57-63) for an enlightening discussion of this issue.)

The insistence that translators should work into their native language would thus appear to involve an unfair prioritisation of the TL, to the inevitable detriment of the SL (see Section 4 below for further discussion of TL / SL prioritisation).

- (iv) the overriding emphasis on *linguistic* flawlessness in the demand for mother tongue competence is perhaps excessive: translation is as much about culture, interpretation and pragmatics as it is about language. As Newmark (1984: 382) puts it, "the 'encyclopedia' is as important as the 'dictionary'".
- (v) in the case of a world language such as English, many translated texts, such as company brochures, tourist guides and sector magazines, are addressed to an international readership, with the result that native-speaker competence in the TL becomes a far less critical factor. Indeed by a curious irony it may even prove to be a drawback, since the native-speaker translator will tend to use a more idiomatic, more local, more country- and culture-specific, less internationalised English. This may turn out to be tough going and therefore discouraging for large numbers of readers, an outcome which would scarcely please the commissioner of any given translation.

Furthermore, if in the great majority of cases the international market does not insist upon a stylistically impeccable finished product, then why on earth should official organisations or translation theorists insist upon it with such vehemence? As ever in debates such as this, the problem is one of degree, i.e. where do we draw the line, in the present context between a translation which is a bit wooden but grammatically and semantically adequate, and one which is downright clumsy, because grammatically and semantically inadequate? McAlester (1992: 294) provides a possible answer to the question of the adequacy of 'pragmatic' translations:

A competent translation is one that transmits the intended message in a language which is clear and sufficiently correct not to contain unintended comic effect or strain the reader's patience unduly.

- (vi) the admirable pursuit of standards of excellence attendant upon the types of *sine qua non* espoused by official translation organisations may paradoxically lead to a *lowering* of standards. Once again it is McAlester (1992: 297) who offers the most penetrating insight. Translators into L2

are usually honest professionals attempting to do as competent a job as possible under the prevailing circumstances. The opposite attitude prescribing such translation work as illegitimate can only lead to its being shunned by conscientious professionals, with the result that, being needed anyway, *it will end up being done by the incompetent and the untrained* [my emphasis].

### 3. Translation training into L2

#### 3.1 Translation training into L2: a pointless exercise?

The scarcity of research devoted to translation teaching methodologies was noted above. Needless to say, contributions on the teaching of translation to L2 are even more conspicuous by their absence. One important distinction that is often made in the literature, however, is that between a process-oriented approach and a product-oriented approach (e.g. Gile 1995a: 10); in the case of training towards L2 closer attention usually has to be paid to the quality of the finished product. In broad terms this means more time has to be devoted to questions of grammar and lexis, of basic communicational competence, whether in separate language courses or within the framework of the translation syllabus itself. Wilss (1996: 206) affirms that

As a rule (at least in Germany), [students'] native tongue and second language linguistic and cultural knowledge is so weak that a good deal of native tongue and second language teaching and learning is necessary before translation courses in the narrower sense of the word can be initiated.

Yet while I would take the opportunity to stress that analyses of the content, methods and objectives of an L2 programme are sorely needed in translation pedagogy, my more immediate concern in the present context is to discuss the implications of the objections to translation into L2, outlined in the previous section, with regard to their possible repercussions for L2 training in general.

The first and most obvious of those implications is that the vocational teaching of translation into L2 is futile. One or two scholars talk of the crisis of the 'prose class' or the 'prose translation'. Indeed these terms are now practically obsolete, conjuring up images of unwilling pupils of Latin and Greek in public schools. Ladmiral (1979: 47-48) makes no bones about his feelings regarding the teaching of prose translation or *thème*:

Le thème est en lui même un exercice artificiel. S'il est déjà exorbitant d'espérer que l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère parvienne à faire des élèves de réels 'bilingues' au terme de leurs études, il est proprement contradictoire de supposer qu'ils le soit déjà avant la fin de ces mêmes études. [...] Le thème est donc au mieux une espérance démesurée et de plus une exigence absurde.

For Ladmiral prose translation "n'est pas une traduction mais un exercice de grammaire" (1979: 50-51), amounting to no more than a "moyens d'acquisition" (p. 51). Newmark (1981: 144) presents a similarly traditionalist point of view when he affirms that "brief translations from native to foreign languages are useful for the consolidation and testing of spoken and written utterances".

In this light translation into L2 is therefore regarded as simply one of many activities to be practised in the foreign language class, with no direct relation to the professional world of translating. It implies that all current L2 trainers worth their salt – at least in professional schools of translation – should hastily convert to L1, even if this means scurrying back to the fatherland, or to any country where their native language is spoken.

### 3.2 Translation training into L2: a directionality overlap – L1/L2 v. SL/TL

A rather more radical and certainly more startling position is adopted by Newmark (1981: 180): "Foreign teachers and students are unsuitable on a translation course". Let us not be deceived by the succinctness of this remark, which crams a weighty issue into just a few syllables. Once it has sunk in, the perhaps most spontaneous reaction is one of indignation, though perhaps my reasoning is warped by the fact that if Newmark had his way I would be out of a job. Taken at face value, his statement seems to allow that translation may be taught both into and out of the foreign language (although as recorded above, elsewhere Newmark eschews translation into L2), but its exclusion of foreign teachers (and students – bang go Erasmus and Socrates) clearly requires that teachers and students should be of the same nationality and should work into the same language.

Why observations of this kind are so striking is that they run counter to the standard practice of translation schools, which generally endorse courses into L2

and which most assuredly do not outlaw foreign trainers.<sup>14</sup> Indeed more often than not the bottom line in translation schools is that trainers are *obligatorily* required to teach *solely* towards their mother tongue (though in university language faculties not specialising in translation, teachers frequently work into both L1 and L2 – see Sewell and Higgins 1996). Two possible reasons for this spring to mind:

- (i) it reflects a widespread propensity for mother-tongue trainers in language teaching as a whole. This is especially manifest in the area of private language schools, in-company language training etc., where the worst (and, alas, all too common) scenario is that qualified, experienced local teachers are rejected in favour of native speakers, however inept, inexperienced or ill-suited to the job these may be;
- (ii) trainers do not have sufficient expertise or intuition to suggest or correct a translation towards a TL which is not their own.

Point (i) concerns a can of worms which in the present context I have no business opening, but point (ii) is of considerable relevance, because it rests upon the assumption that the TL should somehow be prioritised, i.e. if the TL must always correspond to the trainer's L1, this would point to a greater concern for successful encoding of the TL rather than correct decoding of the SL (see also Section 4 below on the question of TL / SL prioritisation). However this may be, translation school students in Italy whose working languages are, for example, Italian and English, are provided with a mother tongue Italian trainer for the English → Italian syllabus, and a mother tongue English trainer for the Italian → English syllabus. The logical consequence of this code of practice is that 50% of teachers in specialised translation schools work into a language which is *not* the students' mother tongue. Italian teachers (in Italy) thus move in the same direction as their students (foreign language → native language), in accordance with Newmark's directive, while teachers whose native language is English move in the opposite direction from their students (teacher: foreign language → native language, student: native language → foreign language). As Newmark implies, this latter situation can run up against some prickly didactic problems, the first of which was touched upon earlier:

- (a) However capable the foreign teacher is in the SL (in this case Italian), s/he may not fully grasp all its subtle distinctions and nuances, be they semantic, stylistic, or whatever, something which may provoke disagreement, incomprehension and at worst conflict between teachers and students, in part because it creates the anomalous (though in my opinion devoutly to be

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14 I am not sure what Ladmiral's sources are when he states (1979: 49): "les écoles d'interprétariat et de traduction pratiquent peu le thème et essentiellement à titre d'exercice préparant à la traduction dans le sens de la version". This certainly does not correspond to my experience in Italy nor to that of colleagues abroad.

wished) situation whereby students are required to 'teach' their trainers certain aspects of SL usage.<sup>15</sup>

- (b) With all the good will in the world, even a highly competent non-Italian trainer may not fully understand the nature or extent of the difficulties encountered by (Italian) students in their attempts to discard what is unsuitable and select what is suitable in the (for them) foreign TL. I feel that this is especially true with regard to dictionary usage. (Another open wound of translation teaching. Kussmaul (1995: 124) affirms, perhaps rather too gently, that "the average dictionary user has a very naive approach to words and their meaning".) Students may find five, six, or more potential equivalents of a SL term in a bilingual dictionary, and will have their work cut out to prune those which (sometimes all) are inappropriate. The teacher, on the other hand, being a TL native speaker and thus able to draw on his/her much vaster resources of knowledge of the mother tongue – word behaviour, co-occurrence, collocational aspects, style, register, and so on and so forth – may well be able to weed out the inappropriate bilingual dictionary options almost at a glance, often with no need for further consultation. What is obvious to the native speaker may be far from obvious to the non-native, and I have often heard students lament that teachers focus too much on the final product while they themselves struggle in vain with the processes (e.g. reformulation of syntax, elimination of superfluous lexis etc.) and instruments (dictionaries, parallel texts, encyclopedias, Internet, etc.) required to achieve it. (See Kussmaul (1995: 22-25, 105-125) for a discussion of the role of dictionaries in translation training.)
- (c) Closely linked with point (b) is the strikingly paradoxical situation whereby the foreign L2 trainer frequently *has little or no experience of translating into L2*. In Italy, non-Italian translators are usually asked to translate into their mother tongue, so that on a professional level they may never have had to cope with the very different set of problems involved in translating into a foreign language. The devil's advocate might thus argue that such teachers lack the necessary credentials to perform their job, because when all is said and done they are engaged in teaching an activity of which they have next to no experience.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Of relevance here is Dollerup's (1996: 27-28) remark that "teachers will have to accept that they, too, are fallible, and provided their command of the [foreign] language is good enough, they can even (occasionally) admit this without losing status".

16 Snelling (1988: 43) raises this issue in the context of the teaching of interpreting, pointing out "a kind of dichotomy between professional activity and teaching activity because, as a professional interpreter, like most professional conference interpreters in Europe, I do work into my own language



### 3.3 Translation training into L2: replying to the devil's advocate

Is the only sensible option, then, to give precedence to trainers of the same nationality as the students and with substantial professional experience of L2 translating behind them? Should (in Italy) only Italian trainers be asked to give courses on translation into L2, whether it be into English, Russian, or whatever? If the answer is yes, then teachers and students could at last move, blithe and unhindered, in the same direction along both the SL / TL axis and the L1 / L2 axis. All those participating in the classroom situation would share a common native language, so misunderstandings and incomprehension in classroom discussion and corrections would be reduced to a minimum. Sounds like the perfect solution. Perhaps Newmark is right after all.

Or not? Here too there are a number of possible objections:

- (a) First and foremost, a course in translation is also a course in language. My translation lessons with Italian students are not confined, for instance, to analyses of translation techniques (e.g. the technique of compensation, whether and how to translate proper names, etc.), or to discussions of where to find relevant or comparable texts which might be of assistance in producing an acceptable target text. On the contrary, much attention is also devoted to the workings, patterns and idiosyncrasies of the English language (idiomatic expressions, anomalous usage, collocation etc.) as and when the occasion arises. Even in specialised training schools with stiff entrance exams, students' knowledge of their foreign language(s) can be very brittle. From this point of view a foreign trainer, who will inevitably possess greater intuitive knowledge of the foreign TL, would seem more suitable.
- (b) However much one concentrates on the *process* of translating, i.e. on approaches to translation and the methodology involved in the transfer from one language to another, the irremovable fact remains that the trainer is ultimately the exclusive arbiter of the final product. Once again it is clear that the foreign TL trainer is more eligible for such a role, particularly during exam sessions. One accepts Pym's (1993: 68) claim that

translational competence doesn't even enter into most of what can be taught on the locutionary level, on the level of things that are simply right or wrong. The level at which translation *should* be taught is mostly illocutionary [my emphasis],

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but, as a teacher of interpretation at the University of Trieste, I am teaching people to work into a language which is not their own". Snelling does not, however, appear to look upon this as a potential hindrance.

but I have highlighted "should" because I strongly suspect (and possibly Pym does too) that this does not normally happen. As Lefevre (1985: 240) – also quoted by Pym – points out:

The teacher is supposed to make competent translators out of his or her students, and the only level on which the teacher can judge that competence, inside the classroom, is that of language [...] The teacher tends to limit competence to the only kind he or she can more or less safely circumscribe in his or her capacity of first person of an (un)holy trinity consisting of teacher, grammar and dictionary.

- (c) Even if one insists on Italian trainers for courses in the students' foreign language, it may prove arduous to find suitably qualified staff, i.e. teachers possessing a native-like command of English and with adequate experience of professional translating into L2.
- (d) Perhaps most importantly, the common language of teachers and students referred to above now seems barely plausible in the light of ever more frequent exchange programmes. It is clear that the increasing presence of students of different nationalities in the classroom cries out for fresh approaches in translation methodology. Pym (1992a: 112) is convinced that the future of translation classes is to

invest more resources in exchange programmes. We have to do far more to integrate foreign students into our studies. And we have to adjust the way we teach to make the most of their presence.

Indeed Pym envisages a scenario whereby the translation class is comprised of 50% local students and 50% exchange students. In that case, he goes on, the directionality issue, at least within the walls of the classroom, would undergo a radical shift of perspective: "The two classes could just as easily become one, going in both directions alternately" (Pym 1992a: 113). Seen in this light, the presence of foreign students in the classroom, far from representing an irksome interruption to the regular flow of things, would be considered an integral part of an important and stimulating cross-cultural experience.

- (e) Finally, if we accept that foreign students are vital for cross-cultural communication, I see no reason why foreign teachers should not be considered in the same way. It seems obvious that the foreign teacher, as conveyor of both language and culture, of fresh ideas and different perspectives, constitutes a vital and indispensable presence in universities and schools.

#### 4. TL and SL: a question of priorities

Though I have no statistics to prove it, what would seem to emerge from the above is that in translation schools it is the TL which reigns supreme, the usual procedure being that trainers teach into their own language. Whether this procedure is justified or not, it seems to hinge upon the desire to exploit translators' greater expertise in their mother tongue. If there is such TL prioritisation, it is interesting in the light of the fact that translation theory over the last two centuries tended until very recently to privilege the SL, underscoring the primacy of the ST, and the contrived, distorted, and therefore inferior status of the TT. Worth noting in passing, however, is that the ancient Romans had taken the opposite view. Friedrich (1992: 13), commenting upon observations made by Cicero and St Jerome, recalls the Romans'

rigorous manifestations of Latin cultural and linguistic imperialism, which despises the foreign word as something alien but appropriates the foreign meaning in order to dominate it through the translator's own language.

Bassnett (1991: xv) holds that this point of view still persisted in the nineteenth century, although by this time greater respect for the SL text was already long established:

The traditional nineteenth-century notion of translation [...] was based on the idea of the master-servant relationship paralleled in the translation process – either the translator takes over the source text and 'improves' and 'civilises' it, or the translator approaches it with humility and seeks to do it homage.

The increasing importance of the SL was reflected in the nature of prevailing metaphors of translation: the translator borrowing garments, reflecting light, searching for jewels in a casket, or even begging at the church door. Translation was a mirror or a portrait, the depicted or artificial held up against the real, the *traduttore* typically *traditore*. According to Schulte & Biguenet (1992: 3), this change of outlook is to be traced back as far as the 1700s. In their opinion the traditional exploitation of the original source-language text

underwent a dramatic change in the middle of the eighteenth century. Translators and writers began to see other languages as equals and not as inferior forms of expression in comparison to their own languages [...] Respect for the foreign in the original source-language text emerges as a guiding principle, and with that change of perspective, a desire to adjust and adapt to the foreign. This sense of responsibility

toward the foreign in the original text continues as a strong undercurrent of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theoretical outlooks on the art and craft of translation.

Nevertheless, as suggested above, in recent years the roles seem to have been reversed. Snell-Hornby notes a "swing of orientation" (1995: 111) towards the TL in translation studies over the last few years, championed by scholars such as Toury and Vermeer. Crucial in this context is the *scopos* theory, first presented systematically by Reiss & Vermeer (1984), whereby the frame of reference is not the original and its function, as advocated by equivalence-based translation theories, but the function(s) the target text has to perform in the target culture (see Nord (1992) for further discussion). Indeed in French circles the SL / TL question has become polarised to the extent that it has generated two contrasting ranks, the *sourciers* and the *ciblistes*, terms originally coined by Ladmiral (see 1979: *passim*, and 1995).

It could thus be argued that the emphasis on the TL in translation schools is simply a sign of the times, perfectly in line with recent trends in TS. However, another telling factor is the more vocational orientation of these specialised schools, which often give pride of place to 'pragmatic' texts, especially towards L2. For some time now a number of TS authors have suggested an affinity between literary texts and SL orientation, and between pragmatic texts and TL orientation. Newmark's (1981: 39) celebrated dichotomy of semantic translation and communicative translation mirrors a distinction between 'SL bias' and 'TL bias' (while one accepts that semantic v. communicative does not map precisely onto literary v. non-literary, there is in practice a correlation), and Nida's notions of formal and dynamic equivalence perhaps revolve around much the same assumption. Snell-Hornby (1995: 114) discusses the issue syllogistically:

- (1) the more 'specialised' or 'pragmatic' the source text, the more closely it is bound to a single, specific situation, and the easier it is to define the function of its translation;
- (2) the more specific the situation and the more clearly defined the function, the more target-oriented the translation is likely to be;
- (3) the more 'literary' a text (whether original or translation), the more both 'situation' and 'function' depend on reader activation;
- (4) the more 'literary' a translation, the higher is the status of the source text as a work of art using the medium of language.

If this is so, it is therefore perhaps only natural that this 'bias' should be reflected in translation schools too, though I feel it would be simplistic to attribute TL bias in translation schools solely to theories such as the above. In reality traditional teaching patterns have always devoted greater energy to polishing and refining the finished product than to studying the precise

implications, semantic or otherwise, of the original text. Be that as it may, there remains the nagging doubt that prioritising the TL means neglecting the SL (whether L1 or L2), and indeed the scopos-oriented theories are not without their opponents, notably Wilss (1996: 195), who warns us that

if translators simply impose their own evaluation of the ST, without tacitly listening to what the ST says, they do not translate; rather, they behave in a somewhat presumptuous manner toward the ST sender and/or the TT reader [...] One aspect of translation teaching issues is to pay scrupulous attention to both the ST author's intentions and the TT reader's expectations.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Summary of questions raised

The opening section of this article underlined the continuing predominance of the literary tradition in TS, and the not unconnected fact that practical contributions on pedagogical issues in translation research are still very much in their infancy.<sup>17</sup> Translation training into L2 has received even less attention in the literature. Section 2 dealt with arguments for and against the question of whether translating into L2 is legitimate as a professional activity, with the conclusion that its legitimacy depends upon prevailing circumstances, and that in any case sweeping generalisations on the subject are indefensible. As Beeby Lonsdale (1998: 66) notes:

Directionality is affected by the context in which translation takes place: language combinations, the availability of translators with those language combinations, subject specialists, text types, deadlines and different types of institutional controls.

If professional translating into the foreign language is *not* considered acceptable, then we must go along with Ladmiraal's (1979: *passim*) view that working into L2 in the classroom is to be ranked alongside any other language-learning exercise, such as dictation or the assimilation of verb paradigms. If on the other hand it is agreed that translation is indeed legitimate and necessary as a professional activity, it follows that vocational translation training into L2 is equally legitimate and necessary (Section 3.1). This in its turn obliges us to reflect upon what an L2 training course should entail, one of the most crucial

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17 See Gile (1995a: xi): "The scientific investigation of the nature and components of translation expertise is only beginning, and understandably training methods are empirical and require optimisation".

aspects being the identity, or more precisely the nationality, of teacher and students, as discussed in 3.2 and 3.3. I then questioned in Section 4 the tendency of professional translation schools to prioritise the TL, contemplating the possible historical origins of such a preference.

## 5.2 Concluding remarks

It is worth underlining that in the wake of Venuti's (1995) theories of invisibility and domestication, recent translation theory has tended to encourage the 'coming out' of the translator, the translator as an authority, or as an authoritative interpreter, of the source text. As Ulrych (1997: 239-240) affirms:

Le traduzioni non sono più considerate, quindi, testi secondari supplementari e i traduttori assumono con grande evidenza il ruolo di lettori autorevoli le cui interpretazioni del testo d'origine portano alla creazione di nuovi testi. Il rapporto di potere esistente nell'atto stesso della lettura e della riscrittura è mutato e perciò sia le traduzioni sia i traduttori acquistano autorità.

Where this leaves the much-maligned translator into L2 is difficult to say. The mind boggles when one tries to imagine how the scholars and organisations cited in Section 2.1 above would react to such a statement in the context of inverse translation. Can a 'pedagogical' or 'service' translator, irretrievably low on 'collocational sensitivity' and ever prone to howling grammatical solecisms, seriously be defined an 'authority'? As things stand at present in TS research, clearly not. But perhaps this is missing the point. Rather than consider translators into L2 as naturally and spontaneously incapable, and therefore unauthoritative, it seems to make more sense for training schools to make them as authoritative as possible within plausible limits. Far more constructive would be to encourage students on a heuristic level to find the most appropriate solutions to given problems via intelligent exploitation of dictionaries, term banks, lexical data bases, glossaries, machine-readable corpora, parallel texts, encyclopedias, the Internet and so on. With the vast array of resources offered by contemporary technology it seems outlandish and anachronistic to veto translation into the foreign language aprioristically. In the modern age cavalier pontificating and stale shibboleths must surely give way to more practical considerations. 'Inverse' translation exists and is necessary, and, as Beeby Lonsdale (1998: 67) rightly underlines:

translation theorists would do well to recognise this fact and build up a body of documentation which would help the inverse translator [...] translation trainees should be made aware of their limitations in

inverse translation and taught to recognise which text types and discourse fields they can reasonably expect to translate competently, and how to go about preparing themselves for the task.

With this in mind I would in conclusion reiterate my appeal for some more earnest research into L2 translation training. One area of great potential for investigation and experimentation is if and how a proper utilisation of corpora, be they monolingual, parallel, comparable or whatever, can actually improve translation into L2 (and L1 too). It would also be no bad thing to shed some light on what the situation actually is in individual areas or countries with regard to L2 translation, along the lines of McAlester's (1992) investigations concerning Finland. Surveys such as these would, I suspect, expose once and for all the perils of shunning a creditable and necessary professional activity which, to be performed competently, requires a considerable degree of expertise.

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