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European Thinking on Secular Translation

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Abstract and Keywords

This article gives an overview of the evolution of translation studies and practices. Translation for much of its history has existed as a practice without a theory. The history of translation in the Western world is closely bound with the history of religion and propagation of canonical texts, particularly, the Bible. In the biense'ance period, a milestone in the study of translation in Britain came in 1791, when the essay on the Principles of Translation, was published. In the romanticism period, literal renderings became the preferred method. In the early twentieth century, in Soviet Russia, there was much innovative experimentation in arts and literature, and literary translators played active role in it. In the late twentieth century, the contemporary European translation theories are seen as a series of paradigms that question the concept of equivalence. Since about the 1950s, there has been an increasing interest in making translation theory appear scientific.

Keywords: translation studies, canonical texts, biense'ance period, romanticism period, literary translators, equivalence

1.1 Introduction

As has often been remarked, translation for much of its long history has existed as a practice without a theory, in the sense of any agreed, prescriptive body of rules governing that practice. Paul Ricoeur wrote in 1998 that 'la pratique de la traduction reste une opération risquée toujours en quête de sa théorie' ('the practice of translation remains a risky operation which is still in search of its theory': Ricoeur 2004: 26). But then, much the same may be said of the practice of writing itself. Theories of literature are a relatively new phenomenon, and theories governing other forms of writing—not classed as 'literature' but no less vital to human communication—have been even more conspicuous by their absence. Just as writers have written, so translators have translated successfully without feeling a need for the guidance of theorists. However, European

literary culture can give proof of a substantial body of thought about translation reaching far back (p. 8) into pre-Christian times, and the reflections recorded on the subject may well be termed 'theoretical'. This chapter will provide a necessarily brief historical survey, and an overview of more recent work.

1.2 Early history: faith and 'faithfulness'

Early practitioners in the Western cultural sphere, working from Greek into Latin, conscious of the responsibilities of the translator, identified the dilemmas facing those who were concerned with establishing 'good practice'. Cicero (46 BC) and Horace (c.10 BC) are widely credited with being the first to articulate a fundamental dichotomy: since one-to-one lexical correspondence between languages is uncommon, how is an orator best represented in translation: *verbum verbo* (word for word) or by 'the same themes ... and sentence shapes in words consonant with our conventions' (Cicero, cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 21)? This opposition expresses the balancing act which all translators before and since have had to perform. A close translation is likely to mystify or mislead the recipient, or generate TL forms of doubtful acceptability, while a version which departs further from the original wording risks being 'unfaithful' to the ST in the interests of 'fluency' in the TL. Should one's unit of translation be the word, a group of words, a sentence, or a larger semantic element, perhaps a paragraph? The arguments have been rehearsed many times since, and this is not the sort of question to which theory can provide any definitive answer. The closely related concept of 'fidelity' has traditionally implied close adherence, and thus a preference for *verbum verbo*, although the context of Horace's phrase *fidus interpres* (faithful interpreter) makes clear that he considered *verbum verbo* a procedure to be avoided (Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 23).

The history of translation in the Western world has been closely bound up with the history of religion and the propagation of canonical texts, in particular the Bible (see Chapter 3). Jerome, the Church father who translated the Bible into Latin (AD 405), having given careful consideration to methods and procedures, endorsed the principle of *sensus senso* (sense for sense) rather than *verbum verbo*, but made an exception for the Scriptures, 'where even the order of the words is of God's doing' (Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 30). Like those who came later, Jerome was fully aware of the weight of responsibility that rested on the translators' shoulders, and of the intense scrutiny to which every word would be subjected. More than a millennium later, before the case for versions in the new vernaculars of Europe was finally won, the very act of tampering with the 'word of God' by translating it remained fraught with risk. William Tyndale's English version of the New Testament (1525) was banned, and in 1536 the translator was put to death for publishing it.

(p. 9) 1.3 Biblical influences

More surprising, perhaps, than the fate of Tyndale, and no less likely to concentrate a translator's mind, is the fate of the French scholar Etienne Dolet, hanged and burned as a heretic in 1546, his books incinerated with him. High among his offences was the 'mistranslation' not of a Christian text but of Plato's *Dialogues*. To the sentence *après la mort tu ne sera plus* (after death you will be no more) he had 'added' the words *rien du tout* (anything at all), thereby emphasizing a denial of any afterlife. Dolet's principles of translation include a forthright rejection of literalism (*si aulcun le faict, cela luy procède de pauvreté, & default d'esprit*, 'if someone does that, it is the product of his poverty and lack of wisdom': Dolet 1972: 13; Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 75), but in the climate of his times even this modest exercise of 'freedom' in translation could have dire consequences. If Plato himself was beyond the reach of punishment for denying Christian doctrine *avant la lettre*, his translator could pay the penalty for agreeing with him.

In the view of Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, the enduring influence of the Bible and the 'Jerome model' of translation largely determined much thinking about translation over the centuries. Ideas of 'faithfulness' to an immutable, canonical text, and the subservience of the translator, in view of the supposed origins of that text, were bound to extend their reach and influence translators handling material of less exalted origin (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 2–3). At the same time, the elasticity of 'fidelity', 'faithful', and indeed of 'literal' and 'free', had long been apparent. 'Fidelity' and its equivalents in many European languages tend to oversimplify complex matters, while its imprecision and its moral overtones undermine its usefulness. That other moralistic cliché *traduttore traditore* (translator-traitor) and other extensions of the metaphor, all too often taken at face value, are equally unhelpful.

Nevertheless, for want of more precise terms, these remained in common use by specialists, translators, and the reading public alike, and the debate (termed 'sterile' and 'stagnant' by later scholars: Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 3; Munday 2001: 33, 53) was not about to conclude. 'Faithfulness' often included matching the artistic properties of the original, hence 'elegance' of style, important to early Bible translators, figured prominently in unrelated fields. Dolet stressed that it was important to arrange words so sweetly *que non seulement l'âme s'en contente, mes aussi les oreilles en sont toutes ravies*, 'that not only the soul should be satisfied, but that the ears should also be utterly delighted': Dolet 1972: 15; Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 75). Another Frenchman, Gaspard de Tende, set down his *règles de la traduction* (rules of translation), of which there were nine, in 1665, placing much emphasis on 'beauty', 'elegance', and 'a noble and high style' (Lefevere 1992a: 123–4).

(p. 10) 1.4 *Bienséance*: the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

In this period the metaphor of in/fidelity, coupled with the importance of elegance, underwent a particularly Gallic development. A manner of translation by which the translated product might bear only a distant resemblance to the original led to such versions being described by later scholars as *belles infidèles* (unfaithful beauties) (Salama-Carr 1998: 411). Their aesthetic qualities as pieces of writing, irrespective of their correspondence to the ST, were held to be of paramount importance. This meant orienting the translation firmly towards the TL and its culture, and modifying the source text as much as necessary to match its new linguistic and cultural context. D'Alembert, writing in 1758, unhesitatingly advocated an editorial role, entitling the translator to remove the 'cold and sometimes gross jokes' in Cicero (Lefevere 1992a: 113). Another well-known example is provided by Antoine Galland's *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (One Thousand and One Nights, 1704–17), which enjoyed great popularity and provided the basis for further translations into other languages, including English, German, Italian, Dutch, Danish, Russian, Polish and Czech. To Galland, *bienséance* (seemliness, decorum) was everything; TL acceptability had to take precedence over the reproduction of the minutiae of the original. If the ST offended against TL *bienséance*, it should be altered. Later translators would treat this text very differently, but it should be noted that Galland was in some sense producing an original, as the *Nights* did not exist as a collection before him, and that, while exercising a right to censor the stories and expunge what he considered to be in poor taste, he was less free in his approach to the remaining material than some other translators of his time.

1.5 Alexander Fraser Tytler

A milestone in the study of translation in Britain came in 1791, when the Edinburgh scholar Alexander Fraser Tytler (Lord Woodhouselee) published his *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, a classic of its time, the product of great erudition and extensive knowledge of European languages, literatures, and cultures. While echoing some recommendations of the *belles infidèles* school (he approved of Pope's toning down of 'nauseous images' in Homer (Tytler 1978: 90), he enunciated principles and criteria which met with broad acceptance over a long period: (p. 11)

- I. That the Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work.
- II. That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
- III. That the Translation should have all the ease of original composition [*sic*; not, as this is sometimes transcribed, 'of *the* original composition']. (Tytler 1978: 16)

These 'general laws' may be summed up simply as faithfulness (a word Tytler does not shun), in the sense of conveying the content in full; matching style; and elegance. Fully conscious of the

tension between Laws I and III, Tytler tries to strike a balance between the conflicting claims of the SL and TL orientations. Elaborated in a lucid study, with many examples, these principles exerted wide influence over a long period. (They may have provided the basis for reflection on the subject in China, where Yan Fu's pithy dictum of 1897, 'faithfulness, comprehensibility [or 'communicability'], elegance', has become a commonplace.) It is clear that Law III, in particular, is largely a matter of taste, as Tytler is the first to state in his Preface (p. viii), but he did not purport to be practising an exact science. Tytler dealt only with the translation of works of 'high' literature, principally the classics of Greek and Latin verse, an area remote from science. More utilitarian forms of translation did not concern him.

1.6 Romanticism; the nineteenth century

The *belles infidèles* school fell out of favour in the heyday of Romanticism. An SL orientation took hold, requiring 'faithful', or close, copies of the original (Salama-Carr 1998: 413). Literal renderings became the preferred method, approved by many, including Goethe in his late period, and in France Chateaubriand upheld the calque as an ideal form of translation, applying it to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The German philosopher and translator of Plato, Friedrich Schleiermacher, in a famous essay, 'Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens' (1813), recognized differences in text type and the need to have regard for these; and for the translation of literature and philosophy—his main concern—he proposed as a principle *taking the reader to the author*, rather than the reverse (Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 208; Schleiermacher 2002: 74). Like some theorists of a much later period, Schleiermacher was proposing a method which would invite readers to view the translated text in a different way and make an effort to apprehend the foreign culture in its own terms. The product would be different in nature from texts written and received in the same language, and would make additional demands on readers, re-educating them in the process and bringing them to a respect for the difference.

(p. 12) Some of the reasoning by which Schleiermacher arrived at this position has gone largely unremarked but is probably unique among great thinkers. Most translators, he believes, 'retain a sense of the foreign [*das Gefühl des Fremden*], no matter how fluently they read a foreign language.' He goes on, 'How should the translator transfer this feeling—that they have something foreign before them [...]?' (Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 208; Schleiermacher 2002: 80). This seems to overlook the fact that the 'foreign' is in no way foreign to SL readers; if the ST is not a classic of a bygone age, the translator may indeed belong to the SL speech community and therefore not share any 'sense of the foreign', and the motivation for relaying this impression—if the translator should be one of those who receives it—is founded solely on a subjective feeling that foreigners have strange ways of expressing themselves.

Schleiermacher gives no examples to illustrate how one should proceed in the attempt 'to make the tone foreign'. However, if the aim is to preserve a supposedly 'fresh' vision found in idiomatic SL expressions (as perceived by a non-native reader), a standard idiom such as Russian *kak grom sredi iasnogo neba* might retain its original semantic

components in 'like thunder amid a clear sky', whereas a more traditionally minded translator would prefer to treat the phrase as a single unit, equivalent in most contexts to 'like a bolt from the blue'. Polish *Daj spokój!* would be 'Give peace!' rather than 'Leave [me] alone!' or 'Drop that!' While such phrasing may of course be found as a result of inexpert translation, those translators who, unlike Schleiermacher, bring the author to the reader would deliberately eschew anything that 'sounds foreign' or compromises intelligibility. However, Schleiermacher was the first to admit that as a method his principle required much sensitivity in the application.

Something akin to the Schleiermacher school of thought may be seen in action in two renowned—or perhaps notorious—translations of the *Arabian Nights* from the late nineteenth century. Sir Richard Burton's 'plain and literal' (his phrase) *Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (1885–6) in many ways exemplifies the views on translation propounded by the Romantics of earlier decades, as does that of Joseph Charles Mardrus, made in 1898–1904. The acculturation, or domestication, favoured by Galland was alien to these translators. Indeed, Burton held that 'the translator's glory is to add something to his native tongue', and to achieve this he had 'carefully Englished the picturesque turns and novel expressions of the original in all their outlandishness' (Burton I, xiv). The unusual form of the title, like Mardrus's *Le Livre des mille nuits et une nuit*, mirrors the Arabic *kitāb alf layla wa layla*—in which, however, this phrasing is standard and in no way picturesque or outlandish. *La littéralité* (literalness), Mardrus claimed, was the only honest and logical method of translation (Mardrus I, xx), while his publishers in their editorial note went a step further, confusing translation with transliteration: *Le lecteur y trouvera le mot à mot pur, inflexible. 'Le texte arabe a simplement changé de caractères: ici il est en caractères français, voilà tout'* (The reader will find in it pure, inflexible word-for-word [translation]. The Arabic text has simply changed characters: here it is in French characters. That is all' (Mardrus I, ix). In reality the supposed 'literalism' (p. 13) of both versions was a confidence trick, as the translators were much given to fanciful insertions and inventions whenever they felt these to be in keeping with the 'spirit' of the original. The Mardrus *Nuits* have been described as 'really more of a loose adaptation' (Irwin 1994: 37), but were widely admired in their day, and eminent critics such as Jorge Luis Borges have accorded them paradoxical praise (*su infidelidad creadora y feliz*, 'his creative and felicitous infidelity': Borges 1953: 132).

1.7 The early twentieth century: reiterations, revolutions, and reactions

1.7.1 Walter Benjamin

Walter Benjamin's preface to his translations of Baudelaire's verse, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' (1923), with echoes of Schleiermacher and no reference to Baudelaire, has attracted much interest among scholars of a philosophical bent, especially since its publication in English in the 1960s. His provocative ideal of 'pure language' released by

the act of translation, whose highest form is an interlinear gloss of the Scriptures (Benjamin 1972: 21; Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 307), has commended itself more to theoretical specialists than to practitioners and their clients, since the practical need for this kind of translation tends to be limited.

1.7.2 Translation in Russia

At about the same time in a quite different cultural setting, in Soviet Russia, for a brief period before conformity was strictly enforced, there was much innovative experimentation in the arts and literature, and literary translators played an active role in it, encouraged by Maxim Gorky. Independently of Benjamin, some adopted similar positions, favouring close versions, often equilinear (Chukovsky 1964: 201) though not usually interlinear *à la* Benjamin. For other reasons, and for a longer period, the large body of material of many genres translated from Russian into the minority languages of the USSR adhered to the same pattern. Here the motivation had to do with the status of Russian as a kind of ideological elder brother, whose patterns of language and thought could be grafted onto Kirghiz or Uzbek to the benefit, it was supposed, of the latter. Its longer literary tradition also added to its standing in the cultural hierarchy.

Where translation into Russian was concerned, the trend towards literalism did not endure. It is not a feature of the work of the acknowledged masters in the field (p. 14) of poetic translation in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s (e.g. Pasternak, Marshak, Lozinsky), but it did persist sufficiently to provide the leitmotif of Kornei Chukovsky's important work *Vysokoe iskusstvo* (A High Art, 1964), which evolved through various editions over a period of decades. In many respects it represents a return to a classical view, as the title itself suggests, with an uncompromising emphasis on accuracy, elegance, and respect for the original author. Mechanical literalism is rejected as 'imprecise precision', or an illusion of accuracy, and his term *gladkopis'* (sometimes rendered as 'blandscrip') has entered the Russian lexicon of the discipline. Chukovsky also has much to say about English translations of Russian works, including his own children's poetry—unrecognizable in many English versions—and dismisses those Russian translations of Goethe in which the poetic form is treated as mere packaging for the ideas, and discarded.

An émigré Russian writer, literary scholar, and translator who has received much attention is Vladimir Nabokov, who as a translator underwent an evolution in the opposite direction to some of those translators who stayed at home. One of his earliest published translations, made in 1923, of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, is a model of what Schleiermacher called 'bringing the foreign text to the reader' and Lawrence Venuti would later call 'domestication'. The heroine acquires a Russian name, Ania, and is transplanted into a thoroughly Russian cultural context: the earls of Mercia and Northumberland are replaced by the history of the princes of Kiev; the Mouse, who 'probably came over with William the Conqueror', is now left behind after Napoleon's

Russian campaign of 1812; and instead of Carroll's parodies of English verse the reader finds new but immediately recognizable versions of Pushkin and Lermontov.

Forty years later this same translator, working in the opposite direction on his famous version of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, in heated polemics with his critics and rival translators, denied the validity of any method except literal 'fidelity'. He had abandoned the attempt to render *Onegin* in English verse, and sacrificed 'everything (elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste, modern usage and even grammar) that the dainty mimic prizes higher than truth' (Pushkin 1964: x). His anger was directed chiefly at those who 'never can and never will read the original', but linguistically competent critics who disagreed did not escape. Of those, few could accept his blanket dismissal of poetic versions or the 'impossibility' of the exercise. Other *Onegins*, especially the later one by Charles Johnston, stand as evidence to the contrary, not to mention many other successful verse translations.

1.7.3 Jiří Levý

Jiří Levý's *Umění překladu* (The Art of Translation, 1963), translated (with extensive authorial rewriting) into German and Russian, is a key text. Like Chukovsky's book, it deals exclusively with the translation of literature, as its German title, *Die literarische Übersetzung: Theorie einer Kunstgattung* (1969), makes clear. It has its roots in the work of the Prague linguistics circle and the ideas of the Russian Formalists, and springs from a sense of dissatisfaction, widely felt by translation specialists at the time, with the state of the discipline and its failure to develop principles of universal application. The field abounded, Levý said, in empirical observations, essayistic causeries and aphorisms, and nebulous formulaic advice about 'entering the world of the author' (Levý 1963: 9).

Levý's importance has been widely recognized, but selective quotation and publication may have skewed perceptions of his stated views. For all his attempts to inject a scientific rigour and methodology into the discipline, and despite his 'experiments' with multiple translations and back-translations, performed 'blind', of Karel Čapek, he holds fast to much that precedes Formalism and the Prague circle. In the Russian and German editions, he states that the book is an attempt to construct an 'illusionist' theory of translation, the 'illusionist-translator' being one who, in presenting a translation to the reader, fosters the illusion that the translation is an original (Levi 1974: 47–8). The traditional nature of this approach is apparent from much of its terminology, whether Levý is dealing with the quality of the TL writing ('slavish, uncreative translation', p. 92), 'the sensitive reader', 'dull, colourless, grey' writing (p. 153), or with the relation of a translation to its original ('distortions', 'accuracy', 'stylistic/lexical impoverishment', pp. 153–4). Nor does he shy away from 'fidelity' (Czech *věrnost*, Russian *vernost*, German *die Treue*). He does, however, emphasize that the term itself is extremely ill-defined, and illustrates by example wholly antithetical interpretations of the term (Levý 1963: 72). 'Elegance' is still implied as a criterion, and the notion of 'taste' firmly underlies it. Hence we are as far as ever from any science, and the criteria outlined mean that there is little

disagreement with Tytler ('complete transcript') and many others. There are no references to Benjamin, and Schleiermacher receives but a single mention, for his 'extreme theory' (Levý 1963: 74). Levý is much closer to Chukovsky, whom he cites, for example, on 'grey translationese' which is less easy to remedy than semantic and stylistic defects (Levý 1963: 94).

1.8 Late twentieth century

Contemporary European translation theories can be seen as a series of paradigms that question the once-dominant concept of equivalence. Since about the 1950s, the professional and academic proximity of scientific discourses meant that there was an increasing concern with accuracy, and thus an interest in making translation theory appear as scientific as possible. The first to see all kinds of translation as (p. 16) belonging to the one unified field, with a common concern with language, was probably Fedorov (1953). Equivalence, with its vaguely mathematical heritage, suited that purpose and seemed set to underlie several new sciences of translation. Yet that endeavour has not endured. The newer paradigms have emphasized the translation's *Skopos* or purpose (challenging the dominant role of the source text), historical and cultural relativism (challenging any absolute equivalence equations), indeterminacy (challenging the stability of anything apparently equivalent), and localization (deceptively blurring the divisions between translation and adaptation). Each of those challenges represents a paradigm shift of some kind, enacting conceptual displacements so fundamental that many debates have simply been caused by using the same terms with different meanings. Here we deal with the paradigms in only a loose chronological order, since they have generally developed in parallel, and they all rely on intellectual and technological currents that go back much further.

1.8.1 The complexities of equivalence

The first concepts of equivalence (after Vinay and Darbelnet 1958) referred to cultural adaptation of quite an extreme kind, as when the French military has *la soupe* when British soldiers have 'tea' (example from Vinay and Darbelnet 1958: 55). The terms change so that the function remains equivalent. That kind of equivalence might be termed 'natural', since it is assumed to exist before the translator's intervention. Many theorists have thus been concerned with identifying the levels and functions of the source text, since they assume that once you have those, translation is just a mapping operation. Much translation theory has been applied text linguistics: Hatim and Mason in the British tradition, and Koller and Reiss in German.

The concept of equivalence nevertheless broadened out when the American Bible theorist and translator Eugene Nida (1964b) recognized the polarities 'dynamic equivalence' (same function) and 'formal equivalence' (same form, probably with a different function). There were thus different kinds of equivalence that could be established, independently of whatever was 'natural' before the translator entered the

scene. The polarities recall the dichotomies formulated by Cicero and Schleiermacher, among many others, and meet up with divisions such as ‘semantic’ vs. ‘communicative’ translation (Newmark) or ‘adequacy’ vs. ‘acceptability’ (Toury). This is not quite the same thing as Levý’s opposition between ‘illusory’ and ‘anti-illusory’ translations, where the terms concern the way a translation signifies its source. That second kind of opposition has been pursued by House (‘covert’ vs. ‘overt’ translations), Nord (‘instrumental’ vs. ‘documentary’) and particularly Gutt (‘indirect’ vs. ‘direct’ translations).

Equivalence has thus been used in at least three different ways: to conceptualize cultural adaptation (‘dynamic equivalence’), to refer to reproduction of different (p. 17) ‘natural’ ST levels and functions (where the term recuperates the millennial discourse of ‘fidelity’), and to think about the different choices facing the translator. The result is a rich and complex paradigm, often reduced to some of its more naïve formulations. Underlying all these conceptualizations is the common idea that the way one translates depends, in the last instance, on the nature of the ST, since that is what a translation is equivalent to. That is the point on which the late twentieth century challenged the basic concept of equivalence.

1.8.2 Theories of purpose (*Skopos*)

In the course of the 1980s German-language work on translation formed a paradigm around the concept of *Skopos*, described as the aim or purpose that a translation is designed to carry out in the situation of reception. For the German theorist Hans Vermeer, ‘the dominant factor of each translation is its purpose [*Zweck*]’ (Reiss and Vermeer 1984: 96). That simple principle is presented as ‘dethroning’ the source text. From this perspective, translations are generally seen as fulfilling functions quite different from those of source texts, since they are for a fundamentally different audience, in a new cultural situation. The same text can therefore be translated in different ways, to suit different purposes. The translator must first decide, in consultation with the client, what the purpose is to be, then act accordingly. This theory does not abolish equivalence by any means—it simply makes equivalence a special case, to be sought in situations where ‘functional consistency’ is required between the source and target situations.

Those ideas have had repercussions on the way translators are trained, and indeed on the concept of their professional role. For Holz-Mänttari (1984), translators are experts in cross-cultural communication in general; their ‘translational actions’ can include rewriting of all kinds, the production of a new text (if a given source is unsuitable), and cross-cultural consulting. For the general *Skopos* approach, the translator is no longer a lone figure confronting a foreign document, but an active partner in a complex communication act, where the client’s instructions can be more important than the source text.

Recognition of these professional realities has the potential to shift the whole field of translation theory. The paradigm nevertheless stagnated in the 1990s; it has generally been overtaken by alternative approaches.

1.8.3 The import of descriptions

A long European tradition, reaching back to Russian Formalism and its antecedents in French Positivism, holds that hidden rules can be revealed through the scientific analysis of cultural products. That tradition ran through the schools of (p. 18) translation theory in Prague and Bratislava, touched work at Leipzig, then flowered in the 1980s in Holland, Flanders, and Israel. A loose network of scholars from those countries produced a paradigm based on finding out what translations actually do as pieces of language in context, as opposed to what countless generations had opined about ideal translation. The general approach was thus 'descriptive', as opposed to the 'prescriptivism' of opinion, and it has come to be known as Descriptive Translation Studies (after Toury 1995). The paradigm, however, has done more than just describe.

For the Israeli scholar Gideon Toury (1980b), the descriptive approach should accept as axiomatic that all translations are equivalent to their sources, so that research can then discover the modes of that equivalence. Thus, at the same time as *Skopos* theory made equivalence a special case, descriptivism made it a banal presupposition.

Less banal, however, was the way this approach theorized what translations can actually do in the world. For the Tel Aviv school founded by Itamar Even-Zohar, the target culture could be seen as a system (in fact a 'polysystem', a system comprising systems). Within that system, translations can be either 'central', where they play an innovative role and help to change the culture, or 'peripheral', where they conform to established patterns and play a reinforcing role. For Even-Zohar (1978a, 1978b), translations are normally in peripheral positions, although they may become central when the target culture feels itself to be inferior to the source culture. This proposed 'law' thus correlates modes of translating with cross-cultural dynamics. Its implicit sociology of translation completely undermines all the prescriptions about how translations should be carried out: if a culture feels inferior, it will tend to prefer literalist translations; if not, then not.

An important modulation of this kind of law is offered by the notion of translation norms (Toury 1995). For Toury, the study of numerous translations reveals that translators behave differently in different cultures and historical settings, and their behaviours may be patterned. Those patterns indicate norms if and when there is some kind of sanction for non-compliance. For example, in the France of *les belles infidèles* the dominant norm was to adapt foreign texts to French culture, and to render foreign verse as French prose. A translator who did not adhere to those norms could expect less success. The notion of norms thus opens a relativist vision of translation practices, and this vision has expanded as scholars have explored many non-Western conceptualizations of translation. The notion of norms has also been an important step in the rationalization of translator training. Trainees can be asked to render the one text several times, in accordance with different

norms. Any negative evaluations by trainers might then be seen as experience-based predictions that a translation will not conform to the norms operative in a particular genre or reception situation (Chesterman 1999).

(p. 19) The Tel Aviv school has also contributed research on the ways translations tend to be different from non-translations. The hypothetical ‘universals of translation’ can be listed as follows:

1. lexical simplification, since translations tend to use a narrower range of different words (Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1983);
2. explicitation, since translations tend to be more redundant, particularly with respect to cohesion devices (Blum-Kulka (1986/2004);
3. adaptation, since translations tend to adopt the discursive norms of the target culture (Zellermayer 1987); and
4. equalizing, since translations tend to avoid the extremes of discursive ranges, particularly on the oral-literate continuum (Shlesinger 1989b). (See further Chapter 6.)

Descriptive studies have thus produced a highly relativistic vision of translation at the same time as they have spawned ideas about what features might be universal to all translations.

1.8.4 Indeterminism

Parallel to the development of *Skopos* theory and descriptive studies, a tradition of critical thought has radically questioned the very possibility of equivalence. In the United States, the most extreme critique was formulated by Quine (1960), who used translation as a thought experiment for the theorization of the relation between language and meaning. Quine envisages a situation of ‘radical translation’, where an ethnographer is attempting to understand the speakers of a hitherto unknown language. Quine demonstrates that there can be no absolute certainty about meaning in such cases, and that this same uncertainty is present, to various degrees, in all communicative situations. That is, our interpretations of a message are not wholly determined by the message, and meaning is therefore indeterminate. Quine's thought experiment has been of immense importance in the philosophy of language (see Chapter 8), but it has never produced systematic thought about the actual practice of translation. Those connections have been made elsewhere.

In Europe, the intellectual genealogy of indeterminism starts from German hermeneutics, connects with the aesthetics of Modernism, then informs French post-structuralism, from which it has influenced literary and cultural studies all over the world. For most theorists, the (literary or philosophical) ST transcends individual interpretations of it, and this makes translations inferior and transitory. Rather than equivalence (of whatever kind), the best one can hope to achieve is ‘similarity’. This approach inherits the part of hermeneutics that was concerned with the Bible, but its elements can be found in Croce, Benjamin (who notes the ‘fleetingness’ with which meaning attaches to translations), Heidegger (for whom (p. 20) translations are attempts to understand the authentic

thought of the past), and through to the French translator and theorist Antoine Berman (who emphasized the need for translations to respect the 'letter' of the foreign text). One might also include the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in this list, at least with reference to the way he uses translations and comments on them in his work on Greek and German texts, as well as his later readings of Shakespeare.

Despite this strong tradition, indeterminism can also be applied to STs, making them just one of many possible texts. This can also be found in Benjamin, who sees different languages as complementing each other like 'fragments of a broken vessel' (Benjamin 1972: 18; Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006: 304). According to this view, translators have no great need to respect the letter of the foreign text; they are free to betray the form of expression and to develop their own necessarily creative role. Elements of this second kind of indeterminism can be found in the Brazilian theorist Rosemary Arrojo, as well as in theoretical approaches that borrow from gender studies and postcolonial studies. If seen as liberation, indeterminism allows translation to respond to political agendas rather than to source texts.

The fact that Benjamin can be cited by both kinds of indeterminists might indicate why his essay has been fetishized by literary and cultural theorists, particularly those writing in English.

1.8.5 Localization

While *Skopos* theory reduced equivalence to a special case, and descriptive studies were finding it everywhere, and indeterminism was questioning its existence, the translation industry was confronting the more practical problems of economic globalization. In the late 1980s and more especially in the 1990s, the software industry started to talk about 'localization'. The term generally refers to a process in which a source text, perhaps a piece of software, is first stripped of its culture-specific features (and is thus 'internationalized') and is then translated into a number of target languages simultaneously, with each translation team inserting the features appropriate to the specific target 'locale'. This process has since benefited from advances in translation-memory technologies and the integration of machine translation, making the localization industry a significant generator of new concepts of cross-cultural communication (see Chapters 18 and 27). In the context of Western thought, the main paradox of localization is that, although it would appear to promote cultural adaptation, its processes actually rely on very simplistic models of equivalence. When translation memories store paired segments, the assumption is made that the pairing is valid for future reuse. And when translation is conceptualized as only one part of the localization process, this automatic pairing is what translation is assumed to be. The result is a non-functionalist theory of equivalence, far simpler than the theories put forward in (p. 21) the late 1950s. The theories of *Skopos*, descriptive relativism, and indeterminism seem to have had no effect at all on the ideas actually at work in industrial practice.

1.8.6 Ideas for the future of translation

The term 'translation' is increasingly used to describe intercultural dynamics that do more than relate two texts to each other. For example, the Indian theorist Homi Bhabha sees 'cultural translation' as a practice in which cultural hybridity is produced, mostly as a result of migrations. For the Indian translator and theorist Gayatri Spivak, 'translation' can be the way a person acquires a culture, be it their first, second, or third. For the French sociologists Callon and Latour, 'translation' is the way social actors interact so that some can later speak 'on behalf of' others (so that translation is at the core of all politics). For the German sociologist Joachim Renn, translation is the way that the groups in fragmented postmodern societies manage to communicate in order to ensure governance, without assuming complete understanding. Many similar instances can be found in literary, cultural, and philosophical theories.

Although these uses of the term 'translation' do not concern translations as such, they are influencing the way the work of translators is perceived in academic circles. The influence is not necessarily negative. Globalization is producing countless situations in which translation now responds to the movements of *people*, not texts. Translation is increasingly necessary *within* our current societies, and not just between them. Translation is thus playing a role in which our *power relations* are enacted, rather than ensuring a stable equivalence between texts. On all these fronts, the extended metaphors of translation can be expected to reframe many of the traditional questions about how, and why, anyone should translate.

If the practice of translation is still waiting for its theory, it may be because the practice itself has been changing.

Further reading and relevant resources

Weissbort and Eysteinsson (2006) is an invaluable collection of key texts from a wide variety of sources and historical periods. Munday (2001, 2008) and Pym (2010) offer useful surveys of the state of the discipline, maintaining a Western focus. Levý's work, in its various editions and linguistic guises (Levý 1963, 1969, Levi 1974), remains a modern classic. The most complete anthology of Western theories is Robinson (1997), while the reader compiled by Venuti (2000a) gives many key (p. 22) texts, despite the omission of Quine in the 2004 edition. Bassnett and Lefevere (1998) is one of many important contributions by these writers to the ongoing discussion of central issues. Of the more influential schools of thought, *Skopos* theory is explained clearly by Nord (1997), cultural polysystems by Even-Zohar (1978a, 1978b), and Descriptive Translation Studies, with translation norms, by Toury (1995) and Hermans (1999). On the much-discussed opposition between domestication and foreignization, see Venuti (1995).

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European Thinking on Secular Translation

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