APPROACHES
TO
TRANSLATION

Peter Newmark

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Polytechnic of Central London

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For Pauline

Foreword

In this Volume *Approaches to Translation* Professor Peter Newmark of Polytechnic of Central London has made an important contribution to a more satisfactory understanding of the real nature of translation. Wide acquaintance with the literature on translation theory, many years of experience in teaching translation techniques, and obvious expertise as a translator have all contributed to this well-illustrated and highly useful contribution to a better comprehension of the many phases of the translator's task.

Professor Newmark's major contribution is in a detailed treatment of semantic vs. communicative translating in which semantic translation focuses primarily upon the semantic content of the source text and communicative translation focuses essentially upon the comprehension and response of receptors. This distinction becomes especially relevant for the wide diversity of text types which Professor Newmark considers.

This approach to translation flatly rejects the proposition that translation is a science, but it does insist on treating the basic propositions of translation in terms of a theory of communication, one which is not restricted to a single literary genre or text type but which has applicability to a wide range of discourse and related problems. Accordingly, this volume deals extensively with the problems of figurative language and proposes a number of valuable suggestions as to how these can and should be handled.

Professor Newmark's teaching experience leads him to deal with a number of matters which most books on translation largely overlook—e.g. the rendering of proper names and titles and the translation of metalinguistic texts, which, with the exception of lyric poetry, are perhaps the most difficult types of texts to render without considerable readjustments in content and form.

The second part of this volume treats not only a wide range of practical issues, including punctuation, translation techniques, and technical translating, but also some elements of central importance to any student of translation—e.g. the significance of linguistics for translation and the relevance of translation theories to the translator's task.

Probably some of the most insightful comments in this volume are those which suggest a basis for a critique of translation methodology—something which one could well expect of someone who has had such a long and rich experience in teaching prospective translators and evaluating their effors.

EUGENE A. NIDA

April

Preface

I first wrote on translation in 1957 for the long-defunct *Journal of Education*—an article which is duly recorded in the Nida (1964) and Jumpelt (1961) bibliographies. In 1967 I started writing again, not long after Anthony Crane and I had launched the first full-time postgraduate course in technical and specialized translation at what was then the Holborn College of Law, Languages and Commerce. In fact, I am something of a compulsive writer, but I am first a teacher, and though I owe much to Nida and the Leipzig School (or rather, as I saw them when I first became interested in translation theory, the *Fremdsprachen* writers), the main source of stimulation for my papers, and more particularly my propositions, is my classes.

Linguistics, in the modern sense of the word, did not exist in Great Britain 25 years ago except perhaps at J. R. Firth's SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) of the University of London. In its wake, translation theory is slowly developing from a series of rather general reflections and essays on the merits of faithful and free translation—interspersed with clichified epigrams identifying translation with women, carpets, traitors, coats, mirrors, Turkish tapestry (the reverse side), copper coins, false portraits, clear or coloured glass, musical transcriptions, wives, heroism and folly—to represent an identifiable and somewhat peculiar discipline. It is an academic pursuit that is dependent upon and apparently subordinate to a practical exercise. In a sense it is at third remove. Those who can, write; those who cannot, translate; those who cannot translate, write about translation. However, Goethe and a host of respectable writers who wrote well, translated well and wrote well about translation are an obvious disproof of this adapted Shavianism.

The fascination of translation theory lies in the large scope of its pertinence, its basic appeal (the concern with words) and its disparate levels, from the meaning within a context, of, say, a full stop to the meaning within another context of, say, the word 'God'. Translation theory's present standing is not yet secure. To begin with, 'everyone' has views about translation, many have written about it, few have written books about it. It is taught at various universities in the Federal Republic, the GDR and in other Eastern Bloc countries; at the universities of Paris, Amsterdam, Montreal, Ottawa and Tel-Aviv. 'Verrons-nous un jour figurer aux programmes des universités un cours de "Sciences de la Traduction" qui placerait à leur juste rang le traducteur et l'interprète dans la communauté culturelle?' M. E. Williams, Président of the École de Traduction et d'Interprétation of Geneva University, wrote wistfully in *Parallèles*, 1978. As far as I know, such courses are unknown in most anglophone countries. In the United Kingdom there have been undergraduate courses for the last 6 years at the Polytechnic of Central London; the University of Dundee and Portsmouth Polytechnic run a course in conjunction with their German options, and

Bristol Polytechnic is about to start a course. There is still no chair in translation theory.

I have always intended to write a textbook of translation theory and practice when I give up full-time teaching. I should then be in a better position to understand the bounds and to grasp the scope of my subject. As it is, I still see many virtually neglected areas and topics. In the meantime, I am happy to follow Vaughan James's invitation to publish some of my papers.

I have selected two introductory papers; three on communicative and semantic translation, which is my main contribution to general theory; one on texts related to language functions, to which I shall later add papers relating to the expressive and informative language functions; one on the translation of encyclopaedic and cultural terms—which is perhaps the most practical aspect of translation theory—and two on synonymy and metaphor; and, finally, from three papers I am reproducing nearly 150 so-called propositions on translation (these a not too distant echo of Nietzsche's paragraphs, I hope) which range from large topics such as the status of translation as an academic exercise and its relation to language-teaching and etymology to indication of the sense-values of the various punctuation marks.

I am aware of many gaps: such topics as lexical and grammatical ambiguity, the translation of poetry, technical translation (I have published papers on medical translation in the *Incorporated Linguist*, vol. 14, nos. 2 and 3, 1976, and in the *British Medical Journal*, Dec. 1979), synonymy (discussed in 'Some problems of translation theory and methodology', *Fremdsprachen*, 1978–9), the translation of plays, the history of translation, translation's influence on culture are hardly touched on. Other subjects such as the unit of translation, translation equivalence, translation invariance, detailed schemes for assessing translation, I regard as dead ducks—either too theoretical or too arbitrary.

With many limitations, these papers attempt to discuss certain significant aspects of translation and to give some indication of its importance in transmitting culture, in revitalizing language, in interpreting texts, in diffusing knowledge, in suggesting the relationship between thought and language and in contributing towards understanding between nations. That is a mouthful, so I would add that some of the unending fascination of the pursuit of words and things and utterances rubs off onto the pursuit of translation rules and recipes.

I thank Eugene Nida for writing the Foreword, and I gratefully acknowledge help from Pauline Newmark, Elizabeth Newmark, Matthew Newmark, Anthony Crane, John Trim, Vera North, Derek Cook-Radmore, Ralph Pemberton, Ewald Osers, John Smith, Alex Auswaks, Michael Alpert, Duncan Macrae, F. Hirst, Rosemary Young, Roger Lambart, M. R. Weston, Roger Barrett, Katharina Reiss, Bernadette Millard and Dominique Steggle.

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Acknowledgements

Contents

PART ONE

Aspects of Translation Theory

1. The theory and the craft of translation

The first traces of translation date from 3000 BC, during the Egyptian Old Kingdom, in the area of the First Cataract, Elephantine, where inscriptions in two languages have been found. It became a significant factor in the West in 300 BC, when the Romans took over wholesale many elements of Greek culture, including the whole religious apparatus. In the twelfth century, the West came into contact with Islam in Moorish Spain. The situation favoured the two essential conditions for large-scale translation (Störig, 1963): a qualitative difference in culture (the West was inferior but scientifically acquisitive and receptive to new ideas) and continuous contact between two languages. When the Moorish supremacy collapsed in Spain, the Toledo school of translators translated Arabic versions of Greek scientific and philosophical classics. Luther's Bible translation in 1522 laid the foundations of modern German and King James's Bible (1611) had a seminal influence on English language and literature. Significant periods of translation preceded Shakespeare and his contemporaries, French classicism and the Romantic Movements.

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The twentieth century has been called the 'age of translation' (Jumpelt, 1961) or 'reproduction' (Benjamin, 1923). Whereas in the nineteenth century translation was mainly a one-way means of communication between prominent men of letters and, to a lesser degree, philosophers and scientists and their educated readers abroad, whilst trade was conducted in the language of the dominant nation, and diplomacy, previously in Latin, was in French, international agreements between state, public and private organizations are now translated for all interested parties, whether or not the signatories understand each other's languages. The setting up of a new international body, the constitution of an independent state, the formation of a multinational company, gives translation enhanced political importance. The exponential increase in technology (patents, specifications, documentation), the attempt to bring it to developing countries, the simultaneous publication of the same book in various languages, the increase in world communication, has correspondingly increased requirements. UNESCO, which up to 1970 published an *Index translationum*, recorded a $4\frac{1}{2}$-fold increase since 1948, with translations into German nearly twice as many as into Russian, the second most numerous. (Correspondingly, most theoretical literature is in German.) Scientific, technical and medical journals are translated wholesale in the USA and USSR. The EEC now employs 1600 translators. In 1967, 80,000 scientific journals were being translated annually (Spitzbart, 1972). Some 'international' writers (in the age of 'international' culture and world-literature) immediately sell more widely in translation than in the original, whilst others in Italy

and the smaller European countries depend for a living on the translation of their works as well as their own translations.

The translation of literature in the 'minor' languages, particularly in the developing countries, is much neglected.

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In relation to the volume of translation, little was written about it. The wider aspects were ignored: translation's contribution to the development of national languages, its relation to meaning, thought and the language universals. It was mainly discussed in terms of (a) the conflict between free and literal translation, and (b) the contradiction between its inherent impossibility and its absolute necessity (Goethe, 1826). Cicero (55 BC) first championed sense against words and said a translator must be either an interpreter or a rhetorician. The classical essays are those of St. Jerome (400), Luther (1530), Dryden (1684)—all favouring colloquial and natural renderings. Tytler wrote the first significant book on translation in 1790, stating that 'a good translation is one in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language as to be as distinctly apprehended and as strongly felt by a native of the country to which that language belongs as it is by those who speak the language of the original work'. In the nineteenth century, the important essays and references by Goethe (1813, 1814), Humboldt (1816), Novalis (1798), Schleiermacher (1813), Schopenhauer (1851) and Nietzsche (1882) inclined towards more literal translation methods, while Matthew Arnold (1928) favoured a simple, direct and noble style for translating Homer. In the twentieth century, Croce (1922), Ortega y Gasset (1937) and Valéry (1946) questioned the possibility of adequate translation, particularly of poetry. Benjamin (1923) saw translation filling in the gaps in meaning in a universal language. He recommended literal translation of syntax as well as words: 'The sentence is a wall blocking out the language of the original, whilst word for word translation is the arcade.'

The above is a brief conspectus of views in the pre-linguistics period of translation. On the whole, they make no attempt to distinguish types or quality of texts (which are mainly Biblical or literary), and while they are strong on theory, they are short on method and practical examples. They show a gradual transition from a natural or free treatment towards a literal analysis, if not translation, of the original, but there is no development of a theory, and many of the writers were not aware of each other's work.

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With the increasing number of translator and reviser teams for documents and glossaries, the formulation of some translation theory, if only as a frame of reference, becomes necessary. The need is reinforced by the proliferation of terms of art, in particular of technological terms—in chemistry, for instance, a hundred internationalisms a month, in electronics, a few thousand a year (Spitzbart, 1972)—and by the desire to standardize the terminology, intra- and interlingually. But the main reason

for formulating a translation theory, for proposing methods of translation related to and derived from it, for teaching translation, for translation courses is the appalling badness of so many published translations (Widmer, 1959). Literary or non-literary translations without mistakes are rare. Already in 1911, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* stated in a good article absurdly restricted to literary translation, 'Most versions of modern foreign writers are mere hackwork carelessly executed by incompetent hands.' Now that accurate translation has become generally politically important, the need to investigate the subject is urgent, if only to agree on general principles.

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Translation theory derives from comparative linguistics, and within linguistics, it is mainly an aspect of semantics; all questions of semantics relate to translation theory. Sociolinguistics, which investigates the social registers of language and the problems of languages in contact in the same or neighbouring countries, has a continuous bearing on translation theory. Sociosemantics, the theoretical study of *parole*—language in context—as opposed to *langue*—the code or system of a language—indicates the relevance of 'real' examples—spoken, taped, written, printed. Since semantics is often presented as a cognitive subject without connotations, rather than as an exercise in communication, semiotics—the science of signs—is an essential factor in translation theory. The American philosopher C. S. Peirce (1934) is usually regarded as its founder. He stressed the communicative factor of any sign: 'the meaning of a sign consists of all the effects that may conceivably have practical bearings on a particular interpretant, and which will vary in accordance with the interpretant'—no sign, therefore, has a self-contained meaning. Typically, to the reader an iced lolly may mean a flavoured frozen confection on a stick (as a non-participant, the purpose of the object is not important to him), but to the manufacturer it means a profitable source of income, to a housewife a messy nuisance for which she gets a demand all the year round, to a child a satisfying cold drink on a stick which lasts a long time. If one puts oneself as reader of a translated text in the place of the manufacturer, the housewife or the child, the importance of Peirce's theory of meaning for translation theory is clear. Charles Morris's (1971) division of semiotics into syntactics, the relation of signs to each other; semantics, the allocation of signs to their real objects; and pragmatics, the relation between signs and their interpreters, has been taken as a model by the Leipzig translation theorists (Neubert, 1968, 1972; Kade, 1965, 1968) who have been particularly sensitive to the pragmatics of political statements. Thus what is approvingly translated as *Fluchthelfer* in the Federal Republic would be rendered pejoratively as *Menschenhändler* in the GDR.

A translator requires a knowledge of literary and non-literary textual criticism, since he has to assess the quality of a text before he decides how to interpret and then translate it. All kinds of false distinctions have been made between literary and technical translation. Both Savory (1957) and Reiss (1971) have written that the technical translator is concerned with content, the literary translator with form. Other writers have stated that a technical translation must be literal, a literary translation must be free—and again, others have said the opposite. A traditional English snobbery puts literary translation on a pedestal and regards other translation as

hackwork, or less important, or easier. But the distinction between careful, sensitive and elegant writing—'proper words in proper places', as Swift put it—on the one hand, and predictable, hackneyed and modish phrases—in fact, bad writing—on the other, cuts across all this. A translator must respect good writing scrupulously by accounting for its language, structures and content, whether the piece is scientific or poetic, philosophical or fictional. If the writing is poor, it is normally his duty to improve it, whether it is technical or a routine, commercialized best-seller. The basic difference between the artistic and the non-literary is that the first is symbolical or allegorical and the second representational in intention; the difference in translation is that more attention is paid to connotation and emotion in imaginative literature. The translator has to be a good judge of writing; he must assess not only the literary quality but the moral seriousness of a text in the sense of Arnold and Leavis. Moreover, any reading in stylistics, which is at the intersection between linguistics and literary criticism, such as a study of Jakobson (1960, 1966) and Spitzer (1948), both of whom discuss translation as well as comparative literature, will help him.

Logic and philosophy, in particular ordinary language philosophy, have a bearing on the grammatical and lexical aspects of translation respectively. A study of logic will assist the translator to assess the truth-values underlying the passage he is translating; all sentences depend on presuppositions and where the sentences are obscure or ambiguous, the translator has to determine the presuppositions. Moreover, a translation-rule such as the following on negations (my own) derives from logic: 'A word translated by a negative and its noun or object complementary term may be a satisfactory equivalent.' (Thus a 'female' is 'not a male'.) A word translated by a negative and its verb or process converse term is not a satisfactory equivalent, although the equivalent meaning may be ironically implied. (Compare 'We advanced' and 'We didn't retreat'.) A word translated by a negative and its contrary term is not a satisfactory equivalent, unless it is used ironically. (Compare 'spendthrift' and 'not stingy'.) A word translated by a negative and its contradictory term is a weakened equivalent, but the force of the understatement may convey equivalence: e.g. 'false' is almost 'not true'; 'he agreed with that' is almost 'he didn't dissent from it'. Lastly, a word translated by a double negative and the same word or its synonym is occasionally an effective translation, but normally in a weakened form (e.g. 'grateful' may be 'not ungrateful', 'not unappreciative'). A translator has to bear all the above options in mind, in particular where the contrary, contradictory or converse term is plainly or approximately missing in the target language, which should be his own.

Philosophy is a fundamental issue in translation theory. When Wittgenstein 'abandoned the idea that the structure of reality determines the structure of language, and suggested that it is really the other way round' (Pears, 1971), he implied that translation was that much harder. His most often quoted remark, 'For a large number of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word "meaning", it can be defined or explained thus "the meaning of a word is its use in the language"' (Wittgenstein, 1958), is more pertinent to translation, which in the final consideration is only concerned with contextual use, than to language as a system. Again, when Austin (1963) made his revolutionary distinction between descriptive and performative sentences, he illustrated a valuable contrast between non-standardized and standardized language which always interests a translator: for a formulaic sentence