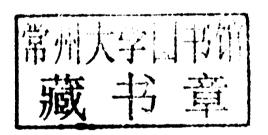# THE TRANSLATOR AS

MEDIATOR

OF CULTURES

EDITED BY *Humphrey Tonkin*
and *Maria Esposito Frank*

The Translator
as Mediator of Cultures

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Preface

What Abram de Swaan (2001) has famously called the world language system has grown increasingly complex in recent years as everyday contacts between people across the world have grown ever more intense. The second half of the twentieth century was characterized by the decline of empire, as the process of decolonization changed the face of international relations fundamentally, bringing new populations to the international negotiating table, creating (or coinciding with) massive movement of people from country to country, changing the shape and intensity of local conflicts, and, in a final paroxysm, bringing the east-west division between the forces of capitalism and those of socialism to an end. The world was freed for what we have come to call globalization, in which economic networks increasingly crossed borders, aided by advances in technology, and conventional indicators of political power seemed to apply less and less. Even as these changes were occurring, assumptions about the nature of the disciplines were changing too. Culturally-based fields like comparative literature, history and anthropology were forced to reinvent themselves to take into account a world no longer centered on Europe, no longer focused on the printed text, and no longer capable – in the midst of massive consumption, increasing cultural homogenization, and huge rises in population – of holding its parts in isolation from one another.

As for theories and practices of translation, a plethora of publications attests to an intensified interest and a nuanced understanding of the field today. This current boom signals a shift comparable in import, one could say, to the one Renaissance culture produced thanks to an acute philological sensitivity and historical perspective that led to, among other things, the end of the *ad verbum* method and the introduction of *ad sententia* methods of rendering Greek texts into Latin, and Latin texts into the vernacular. This momentous change presupposed, as James Hankins (2003) has pointed out, a more general shift in the underlying conception of language itself, which reveals a newly achieved awareness of the historicity of language. Indeed, a modern approach to language, no longer seen as an isolated, natural or atemporal phenomenon, undergirds the first Renaissance treatise on translation theory, Leonardo Bruni's *De recta interpretatione* (1424–26), Valla's politically and religiously consequential application of textual and historical criticism, and Erasmus' biblical retranslations. As Richard Waswo (1987) sees it, among the greatest discoveries of the Age of the Renaissance was an intellectual one: the

discovery of the constitutive nature of language. For the most insightful humanists of the time language did not simply describe or reflect the world but expanded and explained it. Indeed, the actual world these humanists were living in was itself expanding (backwards in time to the rediscovery and re-appropriation of a multifarious Graeco-Roman legacy, and outwards as Europe discovered and appropriated a larger world), thereby engendering a sort of cosmopolitanism, which, at least culturally, contained the seeds of our contemporary global outlook.

In today's world, translation studies and their rapid recent expansion can be seen as a product of work in cultural studies and literary theory, but also in policy studies and political theory. They have taken on a certain priority because the matter of language, locally, nationally, globally, has assumed a new urgency.

Holding this world together, or keeping it apart, is language. At the boundaries of languages are the translators – mediators of cultures, enablers, but also gatekeepers. They are what we might call professional or committed bilinguals. Behind them stand what Milton and Bandia (2009) call the "agents" of translation – those individuals and organizations who set the terms of the processes of translation and in some sense determine the forms that linguistic traffic will take. While English may be growing in strength and authority as a world lingua franca, and while the demise of smaller languages has reached epidemic proportions, the number of *written* languages in the world is steady or growing, and the number of languages with some official standing at the national or regional level has expanded enormously over the past fifty years as a result of decolonization and also of the emergence of an era of cheap internet connections and new electronic publishing opportunities. Their very variety may contribute to their decline as they compete with more powerful international idioms. Indeed, the question that language policy makers must face today is above all the management of this vast array of competing linguistic channels. If the management of world affairs demands communication, the maintenance of human identities demands variety. How can we give the cultures of the world enough room to breathe, while working together to deal with the world's problems? How can we preserve linguistic difference without hindering linguistic communication? Is it even possible?

While the present volume is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather descriptive, it is questions such as these that lie behind it. In it the reader will find specific, but by no means confined, instances of translating challenges and potentialities. Its genesis was a conference held at the University of Hartford in 2006 entitled "The Translator as Mediator" where translation issues concerning postcolonial and "post-missionary" language attitudes and policies, border identity, transcreation, betweenness, technological mediations and futuristic renditions, international crime and law, and literary translation were discussed in an interdisciplinary context.

Several of the papers began as contributions to the conference, though most have undergone significant changes since then; others, including the extended conversation with Antjie Krog, have been added to supplement and expand them. Some (Cooper, Jackson, Tramuta, Tonkin) deal directly with the textual exchange of cultural values and ideas through literature and philosophy; others (Edwards, Colapietro) examine the complexities and pitfalls of the translation process while Dasgupta provides us in his introduction with a historical "template" for thinking about the nature of translation itself. Still others deal with the practical processes of interpretation and translation (Nicholson, Reagan), while Pool imagines a post-technologist world fundamentally different from the here-and-now. Krog confronts the direct realities of living in a multilingual and linguistically highly competitive environment, in which the relative standing of languages is undergoing rapid shift. In truth, the South African situation, with its processes of linguistic inclusion and exclusion, is a microcosm of the worldwide linguistic contest. Increasingly, translators seem to be the guardians and arbiters of many of these linguistic interactions – essential figures in the preservation of multilingualism, and also (as Venuti 1995 describes them) the invisible conveyors of cultural values from language to language.

Our first section deals with the practicalities of translation in the world of today and tomorrow. We begin the section with Antjie Krog's conversation with Rosalind Morris and Humphrey Tonkin both because of its scope and because it provides us with a unifying theme – that of reconciliation. Our second section, which contains the volume's most wide-ranging essays on the theory of translation, considers the role of the translator as negotiator. The final section addresses the interpretation and exchange of texts. The three – reconciliation, negotiation, textual exchange – together sum up the mediating role that the translator must strive to provide in today's fractured and fractious world.

We are grateful to the many people who had a share in bringing this volume to completion. We are particularly grateful to Marcia Moen, of the University of Hartford, who helped organize the conference, and to the Esperantic Studies Foundation, which helped fund it.

Maria Esposito Frank
Humphrey Tonkin

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Between temples and templates

History's claims on the translator

Probal Dasgupta

The present articulation of history's claims on translation theory is built around four propositions: (a) The sacred temple, in the ancient first wave of the activity, set up one broadly identifiable type of translation enterprise; (b) The scientific template, in the modern second wave, associated itself with a second type; (c) These enterprises have a missionary element in common that should elicit resistance on our part; (d) The legacy of these missionary enterprises themselves can be recycled, in a swords-to-plowshares transformation, if we post-missionary translators agree to play these enterprises off against each other as we reconfigure the field. The present exposition elaborates these propositions in terms drawn from the substantivist research program in linguistics and cognitive science.

As translation comes of age, history catches up with it, whereupon self-conscious translators begin to respond to history's claims on them. This is not to say that a single consensual take on translation theory can be expected to emerge from such a process. The present articulation of history's claims on translation theory is built around four propositions: (a) The sacred temple, in the ancient first wave of the activity, set up one broadly identifiable type of translation enterprise; (b) The scientific template, in the modern second wave, associated itself with a second type; (c) These enterprises have a missionary element in common that should elicit resistance on our part; (d) The legacy of these missionary enterprises themselves can be recycled, in a swords-to-plowshares transformation, if we post-missionary translators agree to play these enterprises off against each other as we reconfigure the field.

The present exposition elaborates these propositions in terms drawn from the substantivist research program in linguistics and cognitive science. When substantivism was first introduced – in a translation-theoretical context – it came with

a practical unpacking attached, a passage that we may wish to revisit first to get clued in. What I then wrote, twenty years ago, was:

> It is important to see that no translator can hope to passively 'consume' a supposed 'technique' of substantivist translation. Substantivism is a mode of self-consciousness about the nature of the task. The simplest way to understand what we are suggesting for the practice of translation is to return to the counter-image of the Bible translator whose practice, with its sophisticated successors, embodies [the default version of the traditional formalistic approach to translation]. We have argued that the typical missionary translates the Bible with the hope of conveying the same original divine message in simply another mortal medium; the outcome is that he deifies, and reifies, certain properties of the source language text which become wooden and parodic in his target language output. This reflects the fact that he believes languages are equidistant from the divine Logos and that, consequently, he thinks he can translate without registering in the product itself the problematicity of the act of translating. Against the background of this counter-image, we are trying to see, and to live by, a new image of the non-converting translator. This missionless worker is not trying to convert the heathens to some true faith by forcing the forms of their language into the ideally determinate text of some already valorized Word, but is instead trying out – without submission to alien imposition but also without that sanctimonious 'resistance' whose violence merely codifies another passive response to an alien initiative – viable options in the uncharted area where the target language can represent to itself, reflexively and critically, the impressions that the source language text formally appears to make on the ideal source-language-listener figures that the text throws up and lets drop as it wends its polyglossic way. At one level, this can mean that our ideal translator produces work that emphasizes its lack of innocence, stresses the unavailability of pure or transparent equivalences; but that mode of work, the heroic or violent/ workaholic enterprise of modernism and its "post"-continuations, is only one of the options; quieter methods are possible which keep the traces of heroic problematicity hidden in the new text, while leaving them visible to the complicit, critical reader. (Dasgupta 1989: 39–40)

Since 1989, it has proved possible to elaborate substantivism as a research program in linguistics and cognitive science (the following exemplify this program: Abel 1998; Dasgupta 1993; Dasgupta, Ford & Singh 2000; Dasgupta & R. Ghosh 2007; S. Ghosh 2002; Ravanam 2002).

What distinguishes substantivist analysis from the formalist mainstream in linguistics may be summarized as follows. The prevalent formalist approach focuses on grammatical rules as the primes of rigorous characterization of language. Formalism maximizes the economy of grammatical rule formulations. All other methodological decisions flow from the primacy of the rule of grammar. Formalist methodology aggregates rules to establish as unitary a system as possible.

In contrast, the substantivist approach regards the cycle from sentence composition through speaking, hearing, and understanding to fresh composition as the rich substantive domain of grammatical inquiry embedded in the context of discourse. It seeks a maximally transparent and economical account of this cycle within which rules of grammar and other descriptive devices are to be seriously conceptualized, going beyond abbreviations that may work at a first approximation level but are not sustainable. Substantivist methodology appeals to cross-system translation and seeks to associate each formal object with several semiotic systems.

While contemporary elaborations of substantivism have launched a relatively new enterprise, the twin imperatives – the formalist imperative of writing a tight grammar and the substantivist imperative of providing a coherent account of discourse – were noticed when serious characterizations of language phenomena were formulated for the first time, in ancient India. Around the time that Panini's grammar of Sanskrit was codified, Vyadi (a.k.a. Dakshayana) wrote a major commentary on it – the *Samgraha*. This text has not come down to us, but references to it allow us to reconstruct its scope (Subrahmanyam 1999: 21). Bhartrihari's much later work *Vaakyapadiiya* rearticulates and codifies the project initiated in Dakshayana's early substantivist supplement to Panini's formalistic grammar statements.

The role of Bhartrihari's work as the classical basis for substantivism was stressed in Dasgupta 1989. In the context of the generative re-run and amplification of the ancient Indian grammatical research program in our times, kickstarting substantivist research today involves bridge-building between grammatical theory and the study of the use of language. We can find resources for such bridge-building in Bhartrihari's reconfiguration of Panini's apparatus – a point elaborated in Dasgupta 2008.

In the context of translation studies, what becomes crucial is the multiple contextualization imperative that drives substantivist inquiry. In the present intervention it is argued that we can unsettle the default contextualization of translation in the modern developmentalist missionary enterprise by re-actualizing its classical precursors. Such unsettling serves the cause of cultural and linguistic dehegemonization.

Before we work this out more fully, a brief initial elaboration of this comment is called for. We are taking the position that most current approaches to cultural studies (including translation studies) tend to be formalistic, in the sense of accepting default perspectives – dichotomizing the unity-seeking sciences of nature and the diversity-cherishing studies of culture, and tacitly allowing a western cultural default to position a particular view of 'nature' as a universal or culture-free view. Formalistic views, we suggest, serve a center-driven socio-economic hegemony. This hegemony projects the default culture as if it were a culture-free center from which other views, taken to be 'culturally specified,' diverge – just as male hegemony (still prevalent in so many enterprises even in our supposedly post-sexist

times) projects itself as the default condition and women as marked. The strategy is to manage diversity by co-opting peripheral actors into such a system. These actors are given the task of agreeing to disagree, and thus to represent difference.

The point of departure for substantivism is this initially available formalistic approach. That substantivism becomes possible at all is due to the fortunate fact that formalism is being placed under interrogation – under what we see as in effect substantive interrogation – by dissident actors dissatisfied with the system's tokenism made available in the standard multiculturalisms of a Canada or an EU. It is becoming increasingly clear that these rainbow menus silently install at the center of the menu an English default that manages perceptions and controls policy and documentation.

Such English-centered menus might have made sense, in terms of optimizing traffic flow or whatever, if human nature turned out to have a set of 'natural defaults' associated with it that could plausibly be represented in a particular language like English. But dissident actors reject the view that there exist absolute, universal natural human inclinations. They request registered specifications of which preferences x, y, z are natural *for* which persons p, q, r *in* what contexts a, b, c.

This question of naturalness-for and naturalness-in theoretically and methodologically leads to a strategy of tracking concretely experienced differences as one travels through times, places, and contexts. In political practice, such tracking will have to translate into a serious, non-centered multiculturalism. Note that there are bound to be attempts to smuggle defaults back in – for instance, by installing some a priori method that would try to predigest all that inquirers engaged in real or imaginary cross-boundary travel can possibly encounter. For some comments addressing one version of that 'baggageless travel' proposal, see Dasgupta (1998).

Substantivism refuses to derive one experience from another and thus abjures the practice of installing defaults and acknowledging centers. Thus, the fundamental maneuver of substantivist inquiry is that of translating across views and systems to match things up and identify alignments that often harbor heterogeneity. Such cross-formal, substantive comments express concretely experienced generalizations. These, unlike abstract and center-focused formalizations of generality, do not theoretically and politically subordinate peripheral cases to principles and exemplars populating a center.

The substantivist perspective in translation studies develops a particular take on the interplay between what we shall describe as two major moments in the history of translation. The moment of the temple once established a classical basis for the choice of translatable texts and for the legitimation of what shall count as authentic translations. What the moment of the template has proposed, a proposal coterminous with modernity, is a recasting of rationality in terms of a universal nation-state model.

This recasting so completely transforms the nature of written texts that it becomes a serious, urgent, and fraught enterprise to spell out this radical transformation for our self-understanding and to come to terms with where we, where our various subject positions, define and keep redefining our bearings in relation to rationality. We do all this (re)defining precisely in the context of our resistance to some of the forces at work in the trajectory of modernity, a resistance partly scripted into the trajectory itself, but never entirely co-opted.

We may usefully focus on certain key phenomena in order to get an initial grip on what is at stake. Our contextualization in terms of these two moments – what we shall call our 'bicontextual perspective,' to compress this for future reference – highlights the different positioning of text canonization forces at work within the two dispensations. Note that we are speaking not just of moments in the sense of temporal instants, but of moments in the sense of dynamic impulsions in a constellation of mutually relevant forces. Notice too that the current visualization focuses only on a few concrete instances of a vast volume of traffic and thus resorts to some idealization. There is no exhaustiveness claim embedded in this portrayal; all forms of supplementation and fleshing out are welcome.

The moment of the temple finds in the blinding illumination of certain sacred or otherwise majestic texts a compelling basis both for choosing to translate them and for deciding how to evaluate particular translations as authentic. The overwhelmingly significant texts, consecrated at the point of origin of their canonicity, are reconsecrated in the translation. If a translation seems luminous – or numinous – to those most crucially concerned, no independent criteria are invoked to evaluate its legitimacy or authenticity.

In sharp contrast – a contrast that one inevitably stylizes and exaggerates in this formulation, if we may repeat our point about the consequences of expository idealization – the moment of the template appeals to critically scrutinized knowledge and systematic accuracy as validation criteria. It does this both at the point of choosing translatable texts and at the level of evaluating translations. A first approximation account of the moment of the template, in contrast to the temple's vision of translation as reconsecration, can choose to focus on translation as the revalidation – under target language community scrutiny – of textual norms initially established under the source community's critical gaze. On such a view both communities are assumed to be sites of the circulation of publications enabling critical discourse and appropriate action by civil society.

But such a first approximation tends to accept too uncritical a portrait of the putatively open and ubiquitous public space. The same first approximation lets us get away with a hasty description of the onset of modernity in terms of the nation-state. It then sells us the assumption that in this globalized day and age those

national sovereignties have to move over, and in fact are right now giving way to a new dispensation.

If we take that assumption at all seriously, we are obliged to wonder where this leaves translation studies or comparative literature. For surely, we reason, whatever games the quintessential nation-state machine of standard modern vintage was playing with us translators to keep its regime going must have taken some sort of beating when we were not paying attention, right? The same process has befallen everything else that we thought we understood and that we seem to have sleepwalked away from. So, even in our vagueness, we find all this unsurprising, as we surrender to yet another first approximation.

The bicontextual perspective does not force such vagueness on us. It certainly does not endorse the slide from the first approximation into a series of semi-reflective responses.

A knowledge-oriented moment of the template asks the translator to agree to perform matching operations that appeal to comparable templates – matching the translated text against the formal and conceptual templates of the original; matching the way the new text is circulated among new community readers against the template of the way the first version reached its readership; and so on. These protocols of critical scrutiny, in such a regime of text reproduction across language sovereignty boundaries, imply a telos of text production that envisages export and reproducibility options under the aegis of universalizable generic norms.

The potential for template matching becomes a systemic imperative that begins to co-define the textual genres themselves at the site of production of the original texts.

This is not to say that the appeal to knowledge indiscriminately makes all texts count as translation-worthy or even translatable. The moment of the template institutes principles of selection that massively realign, but do not replace, the classical moment's norms of textual excellence and its criteria for deciding what to translate. New and old canonization processes interact, in ways we need to map, and feed into a much expanded translation enterprise. This enterprise not only manages inter-state relations in an era of linguistically distinct nation-states. It also responds to a commercial regime that proliferates documents calling for technical and functional translation driven by utility rather than religious, aesthetic, or intellectual excellence.

Somewhere in this high volume traffic, the time scales begin to configure separately and drift apart. The arcade of short-term wares come into a certain forefront that redefines the archives of the state and the industrial-commercial system as a stable, long-term background, on which the arcade's meanings depend, but whose function as the site of meaning production the arcade begins to displace – in a

cultural power struggle whose consequences for translation studies we cannot afford to explore here without getting seriously sidetracked.

Our strategy in the present intervention is to note, but to prescind from, the archive/ arcade duality within the moment of the template. We focus on the fact that the moment of the template sets up a translation apparatus as a public service system, as one systemic constituent of the public space. For our immediate purposes we simply take the stand that running such a public system involves both archive level and arcade level activities.

To the extent that translation counts as an automatically available service in the public sphere, the moment of the template structurally provides for a universal translibrary of theoretically producible translations of all valid texts. (If any reader can demonstrate that Borges [1970], visualizing his Library of Babel, did not have such a translibrary niched in his vision, we have some further translation problems to surmount.) The template turns serious translation into a revalidation of the text as writable, whereas at the moment of the temple the function of serious translation was to reconsecrate the text as significant. In this formulation we speak of "serious" translation to register a certain continuity between the two moments at the level of identifying texts that are 'excellent' and therefore deserve to be translated. What becomes fascinating when we take a closer look is the radical transformation that precisely this continuity renders visible, as a mutation in attributions of excellence.

It is not unnatural or inappropriate to begin with the obvious thought that translation was once wedded to faith and later shifted its centre of gravity to ratiocination, the thought encoded in our terms Temple and Template. In order to spare you a redundant guessing exercise, we will cut to the chase and tell you at once that, at the level of that simplified, schematic view of the macroscopic drift, our argument highlights a certain return of the repressed. We take the position that initially the expansion of reason, of science, of technology does imply a universal regime of translation as revalidation of intellectually worthy records. But the focus then shifts from the truth to our ways of establishing and sustaining communities of beholders of sharable truths – in other words, to our cultures, defined in terms of matters of faith and of latter-day reinventions of faith. The skeletal schema of our argument as we have just presented it, however, is neither what we are really proposing, nor a sustainable view, nor even pertinent to translation studies. If you want to get from this abstract headline to a minimally usable concrete characterization of our proposal, what you need to watch is the history of translation's target languages. Expository compulsions limit the examples we can look at.

The moment of the temple translates major texts into big languages – from Greek and Hebrew into Latin, for instance, or from Pali into Tibetan and Chinese. There is some sponsorship even at that moment for a trickle of translation into

small languages in cases like the Asokan inscriptions, communicating majesty and transmitting his majesty the emperor Asoka's instructions and exhortations to the local level subject populations. When the wheel of history turns to make popular instruction an important preoccupation, that trickle turns into a flood.

At that turn of the wheel, Mediaeval Europe translates the Bible into its proto-national vernaculars. Mediaeval India translates the Ramayana and the Mahabharata into its incipient public languages, giving these epics through the same process the status of source texts of Hindu religious practices, whose original Vedic scriptures remain a priestly possession (thematically sidelined, though ritually uncontested, by the popular religious culture built around the newly salient epics). This process empowers the vernaculars as vehicles of religious life but not as sites of consecration. It makes it possible to pose the question to which revalidation is the dominant modern answer. Translation's target language communities, the incipient modern discursive communities, are the site of this late mediaeval epistemic mutation – a point made at some length in Dasgupta 1993 for the South Asian case of this mutation involving bhakti, Sufism, a musical realignment, and a paradigm shift in logical theorizing in Sanskrit.

But it would be an error to conclude that epistemic events in the vernaculars, including serious translation into them, get to call the shots in that late mediaeval process that forms part of the moment of the temple but already begins to set the stage for the moment of the template. Latin in Europe and Sanskrit in India continue to set the terms of systematic intellectual articulation. It is not just a matter of scientific work right up to Newton's *Principia* being written in Latin. Even at such a turning point as the late eighteenth century translation of Kalidasa's play *Shakuntala* into English by William Jones, Latin serves as the reference language. Jones knew little Sanskrit, and found Kalidasa's sentences hard to construe. Indian scholars helping him glossed each word for him. On this basis he produced a word for word rendering in Latin, a language for which his skills of construing and parsing were not a problem. This interlinear Latin version literally underwrote the iconic English translation by Jones. That is an example of how crucial Latin remained even in the late eighteenth century. In Asia, Indian scholars continued to produce treatises in their disciplines in Sanskrit and in Arabic well into the eighteenth century. An adequate account needs to take on board not just this fact about Asia, but the role of Latin in western discursive practices.

The willingness to call new political formations 'empires' was not the only bit of the Roman legacy that drove the western project of 'modern' imperialism.

Our tentative hypothesis is that the master languages retained control over the codes, while a newly salient category of circulables began to flourish in the subject languages. For a late medieval or early modern European, translating into the master language amounted to connecting a text with the reference discourses and