Linguistics, Literary Analysis, AND Literary Translation

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For my grandson, Alexander

Preface

The study of the connections between linguistics, literary analysis, and literary translation may interest not only those who specialize in translation, but also linguists and literary analysts who do not deal directly with translating. Thus, a problem arose in writing this book of how to address an audience composed of experts in three different fields. Moreover, the fact that students who do not consider themselves experts in any of those fields might want to get some insight into the interdisciplinary questions that are discussed further complicated the writing of the text as did the need to maintain a balance between general accessibility and specialization.

There are always many ways to read a book, but I deliberately conceived this work so as to accommodate different groups of readers.

1 First, the text can be read as a general initiation, without paying any attention to notes or cross-references. An effort has been made not to present material in any chapter that presupposes that the reader is familiar with data provided in the notes to previous chapters.

2 Rather than seeing each chapter as isolated and self-contained, one can check the cross-references, which help in the discovery of the implications for other areas of investigation of a theory or construct formulated in connection with a specific problem. Sometimes these implications are quite obvious, but in other instances they are not.

3 For those who want to go a step farther, notes are provided in a separate section of the book. Some notes are of a bibliographical nature; others provide the original text of English translations, or indicate the passage on which a remark in the main text is based. Furthermore, some contain commentaries and explanations introducing other points of view than those discussed in the text. Not all commentaries will be relevant for all readers, and each reader can make his[1] own selection.

4 Finally, the reference list contains many titles that can serve as a starting-point for further investigations in a specific area. As only those books and articles that are mentioned in the text or in the notes are listed, it will not be difficult to find those starting-points, even though the references are arranged in alphabetical order and not according to subject-matter.

Readers looking for a theoretical position will have considerable difficulty finding 'where the author stands.' They should not forget, however, that the main purpose of this book is not to give an exhaustive description of a linguistic or a literary model for text analysis, but to investigate what the implications of certain features of different models are for the translator of literary works. That some of the conclusions one arrives at for translation raise some doubts about the general validity of some theoretical positions and underline their reductive character could be seen as a rejection of theoretical models. Such an interpretation goes too far, however. In my opinion each model can make important contributions and shed new light on some aspect of linguistic or literary analysis, provided it is presented in comprehensible language or in an accessible formula. However, very often, if not always, the advantage of a theory in one area is counterbalanced by a disadvantage, be it negligence or fuzziness, in another.

So, one could say that the absence of all-encompassing models excluding all other approaches represents in itself a theoretical stand, as it reflects my opinion that no theory is good enough to be pre-eminent over all other theories dealing with the same problems. Tolerance for ideas that do not coincide with one's own preferences, and a continuous effort to be as clear as possible, seem to me the most important qualities needed for a fruitful discussion.

Many students, colleagues, and friends contributed to this book; I greatly benefited from working with them, exchanging ideas and asking for their opinions. It is impossible to thank them all personally, and I hope that if they read the book they will recognize discussions we had together, some recently, some many years ago. I am very grateful for their part in my work.

I would like to mention the special inspiration that the collaboration with Henri Mitterand, with whom I taught a graduate course in Toronto in the autumn of 1982, gave me. Without that experience of combining a syntactic and a literary analysis of texts from nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literature, I would probably have stayed within the boundaries of traditional linguistics. I am indebted to Larry Kerslake for

encouraging me to give a lecture on the subject of linguistics and literature in November 1983. That lecture was the beginning of this book. However, without the help of one of my students, Kristin Collins, who compiled a great amount of bibliographical data, and especially without the help of Ed Burstynsky, who not only read the text and gave me advice on many questions, but also put everything I wrote immediately on a word-processor to facilitate reviewing what was written and making changes where necessary, I would never have been able to finish my work. As most superlatives have lost much of their strength, having been used too often and too carelessly, I do not know how to express my thanks for what Ed has done for me. I must therefore leave this linguistic problem unsolved.

My family – my wife, Corrie; my daughter, Elida; my son, Philibert; my grandson, Alexander; and his parents, Barbara and Coen – created with their encouragement and their warmth the best possible conditions for my work. The University of Toronto Press made every step on the road to publication as easy as possible, and I am grateful to say that this book has been published with the help of grants from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and from the University of Toronto Women's Association.

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Introduction

Quite often a translator turns for help to linguistics in order to solve a specific problem he has encountered in his work, frequently to be disappointed as he does not receive the help he expected. Instead of providing a nice, elegant solution to his particular translation problem, the linguist he consulted gives him reasons why there is no solution or offers him a choice of approximate equivalents that he could have found without any outside help. Theories of translation include many elements of a linguistic character, however, and linguistic theories are part and parcel of translation handbooks.

The contributions of linguistics to literary analysis and literary theory are less visible, less numerous, and more controversial. In contemporary literary theory, linguistic terminology abounds, and structuralism and post-structuralism are closely connected to linguistic models. Whether this state of affairs reflects a real interdependence or is only the result of superficial borrowing remains a moot point. The structuralist approach is not restricted to literary analysis, but is used in other fields as well, especially in anthropology and sociology. The same term applied to different fields runs the risk of losing its precise meaning and of becoming too vague and too general, unless in each case a new definition is given. Thus, it is necessary to examine the use of any linguistic term in another discipline very closely in order to determine whether it retains its original value or the value shifts so that there is less common ground than the identical nomenclature suggests.

Apart from providing ideas and techniques for translation and literary analysis, linguistics may be at the receiving end. Then the findings of translation theory or of literary text analysis are used to elaborate new linguistic theories or set up new models that incorporate the data yielded

by literary texts. Grammar and syntax are often based on a body of literary texts from which examples are quoted to corroborate or illustrate the point that is under discussion. However, literature recedes into the background, if it does not disappear entirely, as soon as one leaves the domain of the description of a particular language in order to deal with general linguistic models that claim to be applicable to any language.

Before examining the complex interrelationships between linguistics, literary analysis, and translation theory, it will be useful to make a few remarks about the aims of the three disciplines and to draw attention to some of their most characteristic features. It is obvious that it is impossible to cover all the aspects of each of the three fields and that my selection is the result of a personal preference that not everyone will share.

1. Linguistics deals with the function and structure of human language. In order to discover the principles underlying language as a system and to explore the ways in which speakers and possibly writers use the system that is at their disposal, a linguist may start from any language. However, he has to prove the validity of his findings for all human languages that ever existed, exist now, or will exist in the future, before he can make the claim of generality. Except for some basic features that are part of the definition of language, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find what are called 'absolute universals' in language structure. So, linguists also look for general trends and relative universals and make predictions such as: if L is a natural language, the feature A is more likely than not to occur; or if L has feature A, it is likely to have feature B as well, whereas feature B does not allow one to make any assumption about the presence or absence of feature A. In this way one is able to find for each individual language a unique set of features that distinguish it from all other languages. As more or fewer traits are shared with other particular languages, it is possible to set up language families, not according to common linguistic ancestry (the historical approach), but based on common contemporary features (the typological approach). Besides the universal and the typological approaches there is the possibility of analysing a language without linking it in any fashion to other languages. The language is studied as an autonomous, immanent whole, the elements of which are structured in a certain way. Some descriptions focus entirely on system and norm at a given moment (the synchronic view), others take into account tensions and tendencies as well (the dynamic-synchronic view), whereas a third variety follows the evolution of the language over a certain period of time (the diachronic view).

Notwithstanding the considerable differences in approach and the great variety of aims that characterize their work, linguists[1] have one thing in common, namely their desire to give a description that is representative of the language spoken by a certain speech community at a given moment or during a certain period of time or one that has general validity without temporal or spatial restrictions. There is always an element of generalization and the possibilty of extrapolation in the work of linguists.

2. Translation theory deals with the problem of how to arrive at the equivalence of two texts: the source text and its translation, the target text. A good starting-point is the comparison of the two languages involved from a structural perspective; but that is only a beginning. It is also necessary to analyse the various components that contribute to forming the message. In some texts form is completely subordinated to content. In others, form takes on a much more important role. So, it is impossible to establish a hierarchical order of importance for the components of a text without knowing a good deal more about it than its linguistic form alone. Semantics plays a prominent part in translation theory, but as semantics operates at the point where many disciplines meet with linguistics, one can't be sure whether the implication is that linguistics is equally prominent.

One of the major difficulties of a linguistic theory of literary translation, then, lies in the clash between the tendency of linguistics to stress what is general and can be extrapolated, and the character of the material that is to be or has been translated, i.e., individual literary texts, each of which has its own identity even though one may distinguish different genres and establish a list of features that all works belonging to a certain genre have in common.

3. Literary analysis and text interpretation were traditionally in the realm of aesthetic appreciation and had an overtly subjective character. However, the study of literature has become gradually more scientific and less impressionistic in its aims. Not only are many terms that originate from linguistic analysis and are borrowed from structuralism now frequently used in work dealing with literature and descriptive models, but also quantitative analyses are carried out, conveying further scientific prestige to what was once, in essence, a matter of personal taste. Very often, though, linguistic data have only an ancillary function and are overshadowed by other factors such as plot and narration. The branch of comparative literature illustrates this very clearly: works may be compared regardless of the language they have been written in, and the use of translations is standard procedure and quite acceptable.

So, the basic questions remain. Is there only a superficial connection between linguistics and literary analysis, or are there deeper ties? If the latter, what are these ties and is the relationship reciprocal or is one of the disciplines clearly the beneficiary whereas the other only provides ideas – concepts and models – but does not itself benefit in any way from the contact?

Because literary translation and translation theory seem to be about half-way between linguistics and literary analysis it may be useful to investigate whether the study of translation can shed any light on the questions noted above.

Even though clear-cut, definitive answers may be out of reach, one can try to gain insight into the links among the three fields mentioned in this introduction and thus enable oneself to distinguish between common ground and what could be pseudo-common ground where identical terminology does not correspond to identical concepts. Some of the chapters in this book will seem more relevant than others, and readers will have different orders of preference; it is hoped that in the end the justification for inclusion of whatever chapter is deemed to be least important will have become evident to each reader. More serious is the fact that not everything that has some relevance for the problems that will be discussed has been included. In order not to become a victim of the snowball effect in a field of research where everything is interrelated in some way, I had to draw the line somewhere.

2

System, norm, usage

Ever since Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*[1] was published in 1916, linguists have been trying to sort out the relationship between what Saussure called *la langue*, the underlying speech system shared by speakers of the same language, and *la parole*, the individual written or oral language utterances that are based upon that underlying system. Although not entirely identical, Noam Chomsky's dichotomy *competence* versus *performance*[2] comes close to the *langue/parole* opposition, as it also distinguishes between an underlying virtual stratum and a level of actual, individual manifestation.

Inasmuch as one can only reach the underlying stratum by observing a cross-section of individual manifestations, it is immediately clear that it is easier to accept the *competence* level as a theoretical construct than to indicate for a given language what belongs to that level and what does not, being an individual deviation. Even the just-mentioned cross-section raises some problems, for one has to decide to what extent geographically and socially marked samples should or should not be included.[3]

There are two kinds of language descriptions: one that gives a picture of the language in question as it should be spoken and written, and one that, instead of indicating how things should be, tells us how things really are. The first kind of description is very well known and has a venerable tradition. For a long time language studies were concentrated on Latin and Greek and as the classical period of each of those languages provided at the same time the material for a description and the ideal model, description and prescription were almost identical, if they did not coincide completely. As soon as inscriptions and graffiti are taken into account, the problems of social stratification, norm, and usage come

inevitably to the fore. When prescriptive, normative grammar offers an ideal form of language that is not used in everyday life, that everyday language may become an object of linguistic study in its own right. The aim of studies dealing with language in its actual use may be purely descriptive, but often other considerations introduce a special angle to the description, stressing certain data that are of particular interest. Special attention is given in some descriptions to the internal tensions, and to simultaneous use of different forms, part of which relieve or avoid those tensions. Instead of giving an uninterpreted picture of the state of the language at a given moment, and being strictly synchronic, this kind of study indicates imbalances and possible trends and has a dynamic-synchronic approach. The following examples will clarify the notions of system, norm, and usage and the tensions that may arise when they clash or when there are conflicts between the requirements as expressed in terms of phonetics, morphology, and syntax. Phonetic change has been studied intensively from the time, about a century ago, that the Neogrammarians[4] formulated their ideas about the *Ausnahmlosigkeit der Lautgesetzen* ('the exceptionlessness of phonetic laws'). From the rather fragmented approach that still characterized historical phonetics in the period between the two world wars, to the wholly integrated views as expressed in studies on sound change by functionalist-structuralist scholars such as André Martinet,[5] and André Haudricourt, and Alphonse Juilland,[6] the focus remains on internal causes. More recently, together with immanent structural factors, extra-linguistic social pressures are more and more taken into consideration. Linguistic prestige, never completely absent even in the writings of the Neogrammarians, has become a major factor in socio-linguistic studies as initiated by William Labov.[7]

A well-known, well-documented sound change is the one undergone by stressed vowels, except ī and ū, in open syllables in post-Classical Latin and early Romance. Even though we obviously have only written sources to document the changes – a fact that has given rise to some disagreement about the precise dating of the phenomena, as spelling change tends to lag behind change in pronunciation or does not reflect the change at all – the data are well established.[8] One can explain these data by invoking influences on the syntagmatic level (sentence stress, neighbouring sounds affecting one another) or point out the consequences of one particular change for all the elements in a given paradigmatic structure and posit a chain reaction in that structure. So, the change of closed *o* in free position under stress into *ö*, which occurred