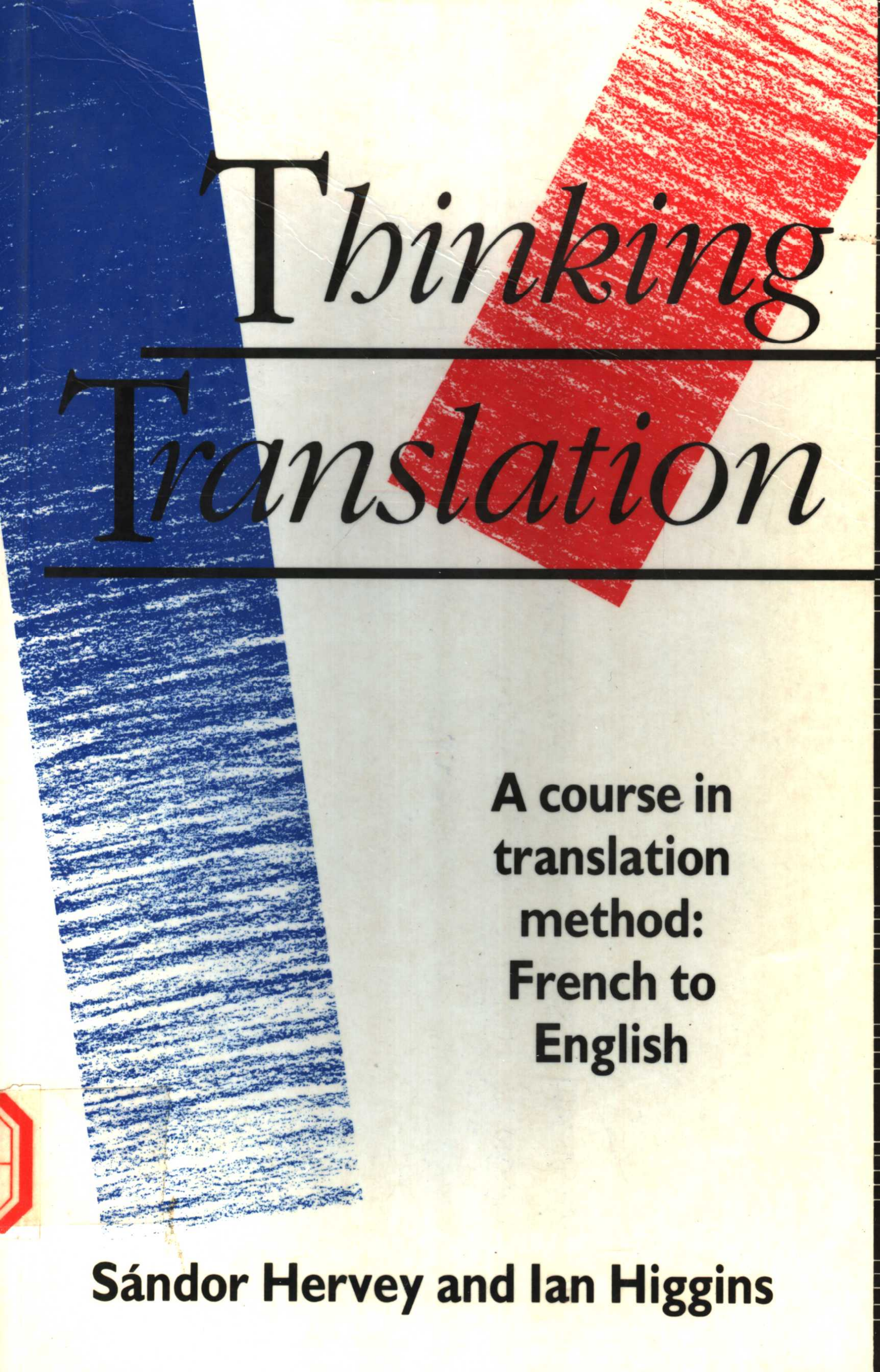

Thinking Translation

A course in translation method: French to English

Sándor Hervey and Ian Higgins

THINKING TRANSLATION

A Course in Translation Method: French–English

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To

Willie Cardwell
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1986–87 – The Elite

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Introduction

This book is a developed version of a tried and tested course in translation methodology for third-year undergraduates in modern languages at the University of St Andrews. The course was first designed for students of French, and our main focus is indeed on translation from French into English. However, the French course has been so successful that parallel versions adapted for German–English and Spanish–English translation have been developed and are currently taught at St Andrews. In other words, underlying the French-oriented version presented in this book there is a common course structure applicable to, and easily adapted for, other modern languages. On pp. 4–11, we outline suggestions for ways in which the same format can be used to organize versions of the course for German and Spanish.

Let us briefly dispose of a few basic assumptions that underlie the structure we are advocating. First, it is not a disguised version of a 'grammar-and-translation' method of language teaching. Our focus is on how to *translate*, not on how to speak or write French. It is assumed that students already have the considerable linguistic resources in French that they need in order to benefit from the course. It is also assumed that they have learned how to use dictionaries and, where appropriate, data-banks. Naturally, in using their linguistic resources to produce good translations, students inevitably improve those resources, and this is an important fringe-benefit.

Nevertheless, our main interest lies in developing useful translation skills and, generally, in improving *quality* in translation work. In this connection, the point should be made that this quality depends on the translator's having an adequate command of English as much as of French; indeed, Birgit Rommel, head of the Übersetzer- und Dolmetscherschule Zürich, has lamented the lack of mother-tongue training in universities, concluding that: 'Great stress is laid on improving foreign language proficiency, but excellence in the mother-tongue – the translator's target language – is, quite wrongly, taken for granted' (Rommel, 1987, p. 12). As Rommel's comment also suggests, it is normally assumed when training translators that higher quality is achieved by translating into the mother tongue than into a foreign language; hence the predominance of unidirectional translation, from French into English, in this course.

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Second, the course is not intended as a disguised version of translation theory, or of linguistics. 'Theoretical' issues do inevitably arise, because translation practice and the involvement of linguistic resources in it are so complex. However, such issues are not treated out of theoretical interest, but out of direct concern with specific types of problem encountered in translating. That is, our slant is *methodological* and practical – theoretical notions have been freely borrowed and adapted from translation theory and linguistics merely with the aim of facilitating and producing a rationale for problems of methodology. Throughout the course, we have provided instant and simple exemplification of each theoretical notion invoked, and linked these notions instantly and directly to practical issues in translation.

Third, the course has a progressive overall structure and thematic organization. After beginning with the fundamental issues, options and alternatives of which a translator must be aware, it examines a series of layers that are of textual importance in translation (from the generalities of culture and intertextuality to the nuts and bolts of phonic or graphic details). It then moves, via a number of semantic and stylistic topics (literal meaning, connotation and language variety), to a consideration of textual genres and the demands of translating texts in a range of different genres. Our aim has been to produce an integrated approach to the various aspects that need to be discussed in the context of a methodology of translation. While we cannot claim that this approach is exhaustive, it does have a wide scope of coverage and a coherent organization.

Finally, our claim that the course systematically and progressively builds up a methodical approach to translation should not be taken to mean that we are offering a way of 'mechanizing' the process of translation by providing rules and recipes to be followed. On the contrary, we believe translation to be a highly creative activity in which the translator's personal responsibility is constantly to the forefront. We have, therefore, tried to emphasize throughout the need to recognize options and alternatives, the need for rational discussion, and the need for decision-making. All the material in the course – expository and practical alike – is intended not for silent consumption, but for animated discussion between students and between students and tutor. (In fact, we have found that many of the practicals are best done by students working in small groups.) Each chapter is, therefore, intended for tutor-student *discussion* at an early part of the corresponding practical; this is because we are not trying to inculcate this or that particular theory or method, but to foster the view that, whatever approach the translator adopts, the most important thing is that it should be self-aware and methodical.

While the course we are presenting is a progressively designed whole, it is divided into a series of successive units intended to fit into an academic timetable. Each unit consists of a chapter outlining a set of related notions and problems, and an accompanying practical in which students are given a concrete translation task, working on material to which the notions and problems outlined in the chapter are particularly relevant. The first fifteen units are designed to be studied progressively, in numerical order. There are, however, four further units, which can be studied (preferably in the order given) at whatever points in the course seem most appropriate to local conditions. These are Chapters 16–19, devoted to four different 'contrastive linguistic' topics. In these four cases, the amount of expository material varies from chapter to chapter; in some, the chapter consists almost entirely of practical exercises.

With the exception of some of Chapters 16–19, each unit needs between 90 minutes' and two hours' class time, and students are also required to prepare in advance for class discussion of the chapter. It is important that each student should have the necessary reference books in class: a monolingual French dictionary, a French–English/English–French dictionary, an English dictionary and an English thesaurus. Some of the practical work will be done at home – sometimes individually, sometimes in groups – and handed in for assessment by the tutor. How often this is done will depend on local conditions; we have found that once a fortnight works well. When an exercise is done at home, this implies that some time should be devoted in the following class to discussion of the issues raised. (Fuller suggestions for teaching and assessment can be found in the *Teachers' Handbook*.)

From consideration of the progressive overall structure of the course and its modular arrangement, it is easy to see how versions of the same course outline can be designed for languages other than French. With the exception of the contrastive topics in Chapters 16–19 (which, for another language, would need to be replaced by different contrastive topics that loom large for that language), adapting the course involves the provision of illustrative material for each chapter and of suitable texts for the practicals. We outline below a suggested format of courses for German and Spanish. A version of both these courses is currently taught at the University of St Andrews. For the preparation of the German course outline, we are indebted to Dr J. M. Loughridge, Department of German, University of St Andrews. We are similarly indebted to Dr C. Davies and to Mr B. P. E. Bentley, both of the Department of Spanish, University of St Andrews, for their collaboration in devising the Spanish course outline.

N.B. (1) A number of the practicals in the course involve work on texts that are not contained in the present volume, but intended for distribution in class. These texts are found in S. Hervey and I. Higgins, *Thinking Translation: Teachers' Handbook* (Routledge, 1992), which can be obtained from the addresses given on the opening page of this book. (2) The oral texts for use in practicals are available on a cassette: S. Hervey and I. Higgins, *Thinking Translation: Oral Texts*, which can also be obtained from the addresses given on the opening page.

OUTLINE OF GERMAN COURSE

Practical 1

1.1 Intralingual translation
Genesis 3, v. 1–10, *The Holy Bible*, Authorized Version.

1.2 Gist translation
500-word extract from a news report in a German newspaper.

Practical 2

2.1 Strategic decisions and decisions of detail; translation loss
Binding, R. 1954. 'Unsterblichkeit' from *Gesammeltes Werk, Band I*. Hamburg: Hans Dulk, pp. 168–9.

2.2 Speed translation
500-word newspaper article in German to be converted into 300-word English article.

Practical 3

3 Cultural transposition; compensation
Hofmannsthal, H. von. 1975. 'Das Dorf im Gebirge, II' from *Sämtliche Werke XXVIII, Erzählungen 1*. Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, pp. 35–6.

Practical 4

4.1 The formal properties of texts; introduction to the analysis of TTs
Ryan, L. 1962. *Friedrich Hölderlin*, 2. Auflage, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, pp. 53–4.

4.2 Speed translation
Translation of 250-word German newspaper article.

Practical 5

5.1 The formal properties of texts
Andersch, A. 1971. 'Mit dem Chef nach Chenonceaux' from *Gesammelte Erzählungen*. Zürich: Diogenes Verlag AG, pp. 101–2.

5.2 The formal properties of texts
Mann, Th. 1954. *Der Tod in Venedig*. Fischer-Bücherei, Frankfurt: Lizenzausgabe des S. Fischer Verlages, pp. 15–16.

Practical 6

6.1 The formal properties of texts

Brecht, B. 'Großer Dankchoral' from *Gedichte I.* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, p. 77.

6.2 The formal properties of texts

Mann, Th. 1954. *Der Tod in Venedig.* Fischer-Bücherei, Frankfurt: Lizenzausgabe des S. Fischer Verlages, p. 55, lines 6–18.

6.3 The formal properties of texts

Liliencron, D. von. 1956. 'Der Blitzzug', (ed.) S. H. Steinberg. *Fifteen German Poets from Hölderlin to George.* London: Macmillan, pp. 165–6, stanzas 2–4.

Practical 7

7.1 Particularizing, generalizing and partially overlapping translation

Mann, Th. 1954. *Der Tod in Venedig.* Fischer-Bücherei, Frankfurt: Lizenzausgabe des S. Fischer Verlages, pp. 17–18.

Mann, Th. 1983. *Death in Venice.* H. T. Lowe-Porter (trans.), Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 17–18.

7.2 Speed translation

Translation of 250-word German newspaper article.

Practical 8

8.1 Connotative meaning

Brecht, B. 1958. 'Vom armen BB' from *Gedichte und Lieder.* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, pp. 8–9.

8.2 Connotative meaning

Carossa, H. 1977. 'Alter Baum im Sonnenaufgang', (ed.) K. O. Conrady. *Das Große Deutsche Gedichtbuch* Kronberg/Ts: Athenäum-Verlag, p. 675.

Practical 9

9.1 Language variety: dialect and sociolect

'Die Linde', *Deutsche Dialekte,* Inter Nationes, Bonn (Kultureller Tonbanddienst), pp. 24–5.

9.2 Language variety: dialect and sociolect

'Tabakspflanzen', *Deutsche Dialekte,* Inter Nationes, Bonn (Kultureller Tonbanddienst), pp. 25–6.

Practical 10

10.1 Language variety: social register and tonal register

Lampe, F. 1953. *Eduard: eine kleine Formenfibel*, (ed.) L. Forster, *German Tales of our Time*, London: Harrap, pp. 107–10.

10.2 Language variety

Zuckmayer, C. 1962. *Des Teufels General.* London: Harrap, pp. 188–91.

Practical 11

11.1 Genre

'Wort der Bischöfe', *Amtsblatt des Erzbistums Köln*, 15.9.1980.

11.2 Genre: crossover between oral and written genres

Brecht, B. 1988. 'Die Seeräuberjenny' from *Gedichte I.* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, pp. 135–6.

'Die Seeräuberjenny', sung by Lotte Lenya, music by Kurt Weill, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (conductor Wilhelm Brückner-Rüggeberg), CBS 72991 (CBS 77268), 1972, Side 2.

Practical 12

12.1 Subtitling

'Missedainen', *Deutsche Dialekte*, Inter Nationes, Bonn (Kultureller Tonbanddienst), pp. 88–90.

12.2 Speed translation

Zuckmayer, C. 1960. *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. III. Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, pp. 302–3.

Practical 13

13.1 Technical Translation

Stackelberg, M. von. 1934. 'Die Struktur einer Reihe von Karbiden' from *Die Bauprinzipien der Karbide*, Z. Phys. Chem B., Vol. 27, p. 56.

Practical 14

14.1 Consumer-oriented texts

'Kräuterrührei' from 'Was Essen Wir Heute?', *Brigitte, Rezept-Sonderheft* (1979). Hamburg: Verlag Gruner und Jahr, p. 69.

14.2 Consumer-oriented texts

'Scheiterhaufen' from 'Was Essen Wir Heute?', *Brigitte, Rezept-Sonderheft* (1979). Hamburg: Verlag Gruner und Jahr, p. 69.

14.3 Consumer-oriented texts
'Verbundfahren mit Fahrschein', information leaflet produced by the Frankfurter Verkehrs- und Tarifverbund, 1975.

Practical 15

15.1 Stylistic editing
Musil, R. 1957. 'Grigia' from *Sämtliche Erzählungen*. Hamburg: Rowohlt, p. 225 (rough TT produced for editing purposes by course tutor).

Suggested 'contrastive topics' German–English:

Contrastive Topic 1
Problems of translating German modal particles.

Contrastive Topic 2
Translation problems related to flexible word order in German predicative clauses.

Contrastive Topic 3
Problems of translating German verbal constructions: verbs with separable and inseparable prefixes.

Contrastive Topic 4
Translation problems related to German modal verbs.

OUTLINE OF SPANISH COURSE

Practical 1

1.1 Intralingual translation
Genesis 3, vv. 1–10, *The Holy Bible*, Authorized Version.

1.2 Gist translation
500-word extract from an editorial in a Spanish newspaper.

Practical 2

2.1 Strategic decisions and decisions of detail; translation loss
Cortázar, J. 1976. 'Estación de la mano', *Los relatos: juegos*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, pp. 57–8.

2.2 Speed translation
500-word newspaper article in Spanish to be converted into 300-word English article.

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