Teaching Translation and Interpreting 4

EDITED BY

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Building bridges

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Editor's foreword

This volume contains selected papers from the Fourth Language International Conference on 'Teaching Translation and Interpreting: Building Bridges' which was held in Shanghai in December 1998. The Language International conference series, conceived as an Elsinore-based biannual event and started in 1991 in Denmark by Cay Dollerup, has now gathered truly international momentum. After the first three conferences held in 1991, 1993 and 1995 respectively, the fourth conference took place in Shanghai, and the fifth in Bloemfontein, South Africa in 2001.

Shanghai is a city built on cultural cross-currents — the very forces which create and sustain translation activities. Founded in the mid-19th century as a result of East-West conflicts,[1] the city benefited from an influx of economic and administrative resources as well as human talent and grew rapidly into a metropolis of world renown. By the early 20th century it was a place where the cultures and systems of East and West lived side by side, sometimes acrimoniously, but mostly in mutual accommodation. Shanghai was also the centre of China's translation activities in the first half of the 20th century — activities that contributed significantly to the success of a revolution in 1911 and the emergence of a new culture in the 1920s. After an enforced isolation imposed by the People's Republic of China for some thirty years, in the last two decades the city has again become the hub of international activities and an engine for change, with a corresponding increase in its translator population. Thus both in terms of Asian history and current development, it was a most fitting choice as host city for our conference.

The Shanghai conference of 1998 played host to 100 participants from twenty-two countries, representing all five continents. As expected, there was a much stronger Asian presence — both in terms of participants and in terms of languages — than in most other international T/I conferences. It also represented an attempt at using two working languages in the parallel sessions. While the use of Chinese had the advantage of drawing in more local participation, it also resulted in a slight sense segregation because Chinese presentations were not accessible to non-Chinese speakers. That large-scale academic conferences (even those on translation and interpreting) often cannot afford the kind of professional interpreting necessary for truly bilingual or multilingual

dialogue is indicative of the constraints faced by the field; at the same time this also shows the potential for future development.

The papers in this volume are all related to issues of teaching and the development of the translation and interpreting professions. They are divided into four groups. The first group of papers deals with the application of theory to and its influence on teaching and practice. Both Theo Hermans (U.K.) and K.K. Sin (Hong Kong) examine current discourses on translation. Hermans reviews the current perception and self-perception of translation, translators and translation theories, revealing the discourses about translation in other cultures as neither neutral nor value-free. As translation studies struggles to extend its theoretical discussions beyond the European tradition and its languages, Hermans' investigation proves essential and timely. Sin challenges both the product-oriented and the more recent process-oriented approaches in translation studies, and advocates the use of a socio-cultural perspective in teaching. Chunsen Zhu (Hong Kong) addresses the perennial question 'Is translation theory useful' through a critique of existing modes of theorizing about translation in China, and illustrates the positive role of theory through concrete and clearly argued examples.

The second group of papers concentrates on what happens in the classroom and contains a substantial number of case studies. The computer and the Internet, which have become an indispensable part of the translation profession, now feature more and more strongly in teaching. Judy Wakabayashi (Australia) explores the new perspectives brought to teaching by the use of Internet mailing lists. Sue Zeng and Jung Ying Lu-Chen (Hawaii) made the World Wide Web part of their task-based training model. Ingrid Kurz (Austria) reviews the interpreting programme in the University of Vienna, focusing on the importance of cooperation between different language departments within a university, collaboration with prospective employers, and the use of new technology.

Two papers in this section introduce us to training for specific purposes. Birgitta Englund Dimitrova (Sweden) points out that training is not just necessary for prospective T/I practitioners, but also for prospective T/I teachers. Her paper discusses a course tailored to the needs of the latter. Annelie Lotriet (South Africa) presents a unique case study of training interpreters within an extremely limited time frame for a specific job — the Peace and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa — and examines the conditions necessary for the success of such target-specific programmes.

Quality assessment is one of the main concerns of teachers and professionals alike. Kinga Klaudy and Krisztina Károly (Hungary) conducted a pilot study of markers of cohesion in a set of original and translated texts, and concluded that the repetition model may be a good quality indicator for assessing translation quality. Alessandra Riccardi (Italy) focuses on the difference between the usual assessment of a professional interpreter's work vs. that of a student's, and proposes a list of parameters for student assessment.

The third group of papers are concerned with the role of literature and culture in the T/I classroom. Viggo Hjørnager Pedersen (Denmark) undertook a detailed study of children's literature in Danish and English with his M.A. students in an attempt to give literary translation its rightful place in the history of a national literature. Judith Woodsworth (Canada), on the other hand, draws on her personal experience as literary translator to explore with her students the disjunctures between some recent translation theories and market pressures and demands. Paul Levine (Hong Kong) uses his experience of teaching Chinese undergraduates in Hong Kong as the basis to present possible ways of contextualizing cultural knowledge for T/I students.

The fourth group of papers looks at various aspects of change and development in the T/I professions, which will of course have a direct impact on how translation and interpreting will be taught. Roda Roberts (Canada) examines the possibilities and limitations of community interpreting as a separate and distinctive profession. Yang Cheng-shu (Taiwan), drawing from her experience in managing various forms of TV interpreting in Hong Kong and Taiwan, maps out the landscape of this fast-developing niche which requires a combination of translation and interpreting skills as well as specialized training related to TV presentation. Alain Piette (France) relates his experience in and assessment of television and film dubbing. Mabel Erasmus (South Africa) studies how the T/I requirements of a conscientious government with limited resources and a liberal language policy can be fulfilled. Lastly, Lin Wusun (China) surveys the current translation and interpreting scene in China, and looks forward to the prospects of the field in the new century. Most contributors take note of the fact that professionals will be increasingly required to be multi-skilled and to fulfil various types of T/I jobs. It is therefore likely that the current segregation of various sub-disciplines within the T/I field is set for a major change, and that flexibility and innovation will be keywords of the future.

Eva Hung

Note

1. China's defeat in the Opium War (1840–1842) led to the Treaty of Nanjing, which specified the opening up of five coastal trading ports, including Shanghai.

Acknowledgements

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While I owe a debt of gratitude to all my Shanghai co-organizers, special thanks should go to Pan Zhixing, whose hard work and efficiency made the conference a real success both as an academic and a social event.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Research Centre for Translation, Alison Wong, Alena Chow and Cecilia Ip, for their help in organizing the conference, P.S. Tam for his assistance in proof-reading, and Kaman Chan and Audrey Heijns for their assistance in compiling the index. I am also grateful to Isjtar Conen of John Benjamins for overseeing the production of this volume.

E.H.

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Theory and teaching

Translation's representations

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1.

Yesterday, or this morning, you read the newspaper, listened to a news bulletin on the radio or watched one on television. If your attention was caught by one or more items from abroad, you will almost certainly, in one way or another, have come into contact with translation. The outside world, or at least the larger part of it, speaks a different language. More than that, it speaks a variety of different languages, and they are mutually incomprehensible. That is why we need translation, and why translation is such a useful thing. Information which would otherwise remain inaccessible to us due to a language barrier, is retrieved nevertheless and, through translation, made accessible, offered to us in a form we can understand.

Of course, we not only need and use translation on a daily basis, we have also come to expect, even to demand, certain things of it. The assumption we as consumers make, and feel entitled to make, is that the product we are being offered constitutes a "proper" translation, one which transmits the original information in a reliable, trustworthy manner. We expect the original message to have remained essentially intact during the transmission, accurately conveyed despite the translingual recoding performed by the intermediary. This requires that the intermediary, too, should be worthy of our trust.

The ways in which we normally think and speak about translation, and the conventional metaphors we employ to do so, reflect the two aspects of translation I have alluded to: on the one hand, the necessity and usefulness of translation as a means of retrieving and conveying information across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and, on the other, our expectation, our insistence even, that the translation product be reliable, that it provide a full and accurate representation of its source. Let us stay for a few moments with these standard perceptions of translation and the metaphors associated with them.

The first aspect, that of transmission and retrieval, points to the enabling function of translation. Translation renders communication possible despite language differences, it provides access by removing or overcoming those barriers, by leading us across the chasms that prevent understanding. Here we encounter the metaphors of translation as bridge-building, as opening doors, as ferrying or carrying across, as transference. In several Indo-European languages the terms for translation, with their metaphorical baggage, derive from the Latin "trans-latio" which itself translates the Greek "meta-phor". We picture the translator as a relay station, as transformer and conduit at the same time. The second aspect, which bears on the required relation between a translation and its parent text, indicates how the enabling and the provision of access are to be achieved: by offering a faithful copy of that which itself remains beyond reach, by presenting something which resembles its original in relevant ways. This aspect generates a range of images of translation as likeness, lookalike, replica, duplicate, portrait, reproduction, imitation, mimesis, reflection, mirror image or transparent pane of glass.

The two sets of metaphors are connected. The trust that we, on this side of the language barrier, place in the translator as mediator and guide depends on the quality of the translation as likeness, as close resemblance, as a truthful portrait. A translation, we tend to say, may be a derivative product, a mere copy, a substitute, it may be secondary, second-hand and second-best, but because we trust the translator's integrity, professionalism and good faith we assume that, for the purposes it is meant to serve, the replica is "as good as" the real thing and therefore, in terms of practical use value, "equivalent" with its original. The whole idea of equivalence rests on the integrity of the likeness which translation brings about. Achieving equivalence is what the translator's role as honest broker consists in. Trust in the translator as honest broker is important here, especially in those cases where it may be cumbersome or impracticable to go out and check the quality of the translator's handiwork. In our everyday routine, as we peruse the newspaper, listen to the radio or watch TV, we take the accuracy and transparency of translations on trust. The last thing we want is to see that trust betrayed.

Now, if I may take it that everything I have said so far sounds unproblematic and unexceptional, then this is the moment at which I should like to turn around and declare my disagreement. In the following pages I will argue that the idea of translation as equivalence and transparency is not tenable at all, even though it has struck deep roots in our thinking and speaking about translation. The rather smooth, unruffled picture that I painted at the begin-

ning is one way of representing "translation". It is very much part of the conventional perception and, more often than not, the self-perception of translation. But, to my mind, it papers over the cracks.

In what follows I want to try and make these cracks larger, more visible, so that the complex and unsettling nature of translation can come into view. My reason for doing this lies in the recognition that translation derives its force from its very necessity. It is still our only answer to, and our only escape from, the prison-houses of our individual languages. It deserves critical scrutiny on that account. I will focus on three things: firstly, some paradoxical and problematic aspects of the way in which translations "represent" other texts, with an emphasis on the hybridity of translation; secondly, the question of what translation can represent for us, as students of translation; and thirdly, the problematics of our representations of translation, and especially other concepts and practices of translation.

2.

Let me return for a moment to our usual and casual way of talking about translation. We say, for example: "Speaking through an interpreter, President Yeltsin declared so-and-so". What does it mean: "speaking through an interpreter"? Right through? Or take a variant: many among us claim that we have read Dostoevsky, even if, like me, we don't have Russian. Yet we say we have read Dostoevsky. And it is no doubt typical that even though we have actually read, say, a Chinese or English translation of Dostoevsky, most of us, including myself, cannot even remember the translator's name. We talk as if we read right through translators, just a Yeltsin speaks "through" his interpreter.

Now, to the extent that the translations we pick up successfully manage to produce, or to project, a sense of equivalence and of identity in use value, a sense of transparency and trustworthiness which allows us to accept them as full-scale re-enactments and hence as reliable substitutes for their source texts, statements like "I have read Dostoevsky" can be regarded as legitimate shorthand for saying "I have read a translation of Dostoevsky", which then carries the implication "and this is practically as good as reading the original". But the implication is valid only to the extent that we can bring ourselves to believe that the translation offers an integral and accurate reproduction of the original, to the extent that the translation manages to be transparent with regard to the original and is therefore accepted as a trustworthy substitute. The statement "I

have read Dostoevsky" is legitimate only insofar as the translation successfully creates an impression of equivalence and transparency. And that impression, we tend to believe, results from the translation as resemblance. A translation, we say, is at its most successful when it manages to make us forget that it is a translation. In this view a translation most coincides with its original when it approximates pure transparency and resemblance, when it possesses no substance of its own — so that we can imagine we read right through it and see the original, the whole original and nothing but the original, unhindered.

Such a perception requires that the translator's labour be negated or sublimated, that all traces of the translator's manual intervention in the text be erased. The irony is that those traces, the words which the translator left behind, are all we have access to on this side of the language barrier. Yeltsin may well speak right "through" his disembodied interpreter, but all we can make sense of are the interpreter's words. Nevertheless those are the words we claim not to hear. Instead, we say that Yeltsin declared so-and-so, that we have read Dostoevsky. Even though it is precisely this presumed authoritative originary voice that is absent, we casually declare it is the only one that presents itself to us.

We are casual about this because we commonly construe translation as a form of delegated speech, a speaking by proxy. Translators do not speak for themselves, they speak another's words. They throw their own voice. The performance implies not only a consonance of voices but also a hierarchical relationship between them, and a clear ethical, often also a legal, imperative, that of the translator's discretion and non-interference. The imperative has been formulated as the "honest spokesperson" or the "true interpreter" norm (e.g. in Harris 1990). It calls on the translator simply and accurately to re-state the original, without addition, omission or distortion. The translator's words appear as it were between inverted commas, and the quotation marks indicate that what we hear or read are not the translator's own words. Although the translator speaks, it is not the translator who speaks. The words of the original speaker are supposedly relayed to us with minimal, hence negligible mediation, by a wholly immaterial, translucent mediator.

The more closely we inspect this view of translation, the more obvious it becomes that we are entertaining an illusion. A translation can never double up with its source. It uses different words. Languages and cultures are not symmetrical or isomorphic systems. Not only the language changes with translation; so does the context, the moment, the intent, the function, the entire communicative situation. Words reverberate and signal to one another differently in translations, and other words elsewhere in the receiving culture

beckon differently to the new arrivals. Moreover, since the translator's manual intervention cannot simply be erased without trace, we shall have to come to terms with the way translation superimposes and intermingles the various voices that make up its "re-enunciation" (Folkart 1991). This intermingling suggests it is difference and hybridity that are inscribed in the operations of translation, not consonance or transparency or equivalence in any simple or formal sense. Agreeing to speak of translation in terms of equivalence means lending support to an act of make-believe, a socially and pragmatically necessary act of make-believe perhaps, but make-believe nevertheless.

There are several ways of demonstrating this. The concept of "translation norms", for example, points to perception being laden with value, and hence necessarily perspectival, not at all neutral or objective or transparent. The so-called "cultural turn" in translation studies, like postcolonial and gender-oriented approaches, have all stressed the role of translation in the context of power, ideology and historically embedded interpretation. These points have been made many times before in the last twenty or so years.

On this occasion I should like to take a different route. I want to dwell for a moment on the question of the translator's supposed non-interference, which requires him or her to remain invisible as a speaking subject. My point will be that the translator's discursive presence, as a distinct voice and therefore a subject position, is always present in the text. But because of the way we have conventionally construed translation in terms of transparency and consonance, we prefer, we even require this voice to remain totally discreet.

In practice many translations undoubtedly manage to keep the translator's voice, as a separate speaking position, covered up. That is why I can say I have read Dostoevsky and ignore or forget the translator's name. Sometimes, however, translations produce their own discursive incongruities, junctures at which their own performance runs into a buffer. The anomalies which then open up within the text reveal the paradox that, while we generally accept that translated texts are reoriented towards a different type of reader in a different linguistic and cultural environment, we expect the agent, and hence the voice, that effected this reorientation to remain so discreet as to vanish altogether.

In its simplest form this kind of incongruity occurs, for example, in dubbed films, when the words which are broadcast in translation are not properly synchronized with the actor's lip movements on the screen, so that we become aware of the discrepancy and realize that this is a translation, which explains why the voice we hear does not actually speak the words being mouthed on the screen. We perceive two voices at once. Printed books which