TRANSLATION STUDIES
AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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Preface

"Sprachwissenschaftlich orientierte Übersetzungsstudien können also kein grundsätzliches und theoretisches Angebot für die Erforschung der literarischen Übersetzung zur Verfügung stellen." This statement was made in 1984 by scholars working on a long-term interdisciplinary project devoted to literary translation at the University of Göttingen.[1] For the past nine months the author of the present study has had the pleasure of working as visiting linguist with those same scholars and persuading them that their statement needs at least some modification. It is certainly true that the relationship of linguistics to translation studies, especially to literary translation, is complicated, that only a limited number of issues in linguistics are relevant for translation and that linguistic models can hardly ever be adopted wholesale. There are however approaches and methods originating in linguistics which have been successfully adapted for translation, and there are concepts developed from the study of language which have considerable potential even for literary translation. Some such approaches, concepts and methods are presented in this study, in the hope of bridging the gap between literary translation and linguistics. The conclusions are based on work done mainly in English and German, but the main principles, as the work in Göttingen has confirmed, should apply to some extent to any language-pair.

The author has an honours degree in German Language and Literature, one research degree in German Literature and another in English Linguistics. She has worked as a translator in various fields (mainly from German and French into English) and has taught translation at university level to students of English and to trainee translators; she has also lectured in translation theory in various European universities. Some results of the practical work in translation were published in her two books *German Thought in English Idiom. Exercises in Translation and Style for Final Year Students* (München: Hueber 1967, [3]1977) and *German-English Prose Translation* (München: Hueber, 1972, [2]1978). What is presented here is an integrated concept based on the combined experience in the theory and practice of translation, in the

hope that it will make some contribution to the development of this exciting new discipline.

Meilen, May 1987   Mary Snell-Hornby

Note

1.   Sonderforschungsbereich 309, "Die Literarische Übersetzung", Hauptantrag an die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1984, p.16.

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0. Introduction

> In translation the dialectic of unison and plurality is dramatically at work. In one sense, each act of translation is an endeavour to abolish multiplicity and to bring different world-pictures back into perfect congruence. In another sense, it is an attempt to reinvent the shape of meaning, to find and justify an alternate statement. The craft of the translator is (...) deeply ambivalent: it is exercised in a radical tension between impulses to facsimile and impulses to appropriate recreation. (Steiner 1975: 235)

George Steiner's monumental book *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* deals primarily with the translation of great works of art. The "radical tension" between reproduction and recreation with the "dialectic of unison and plurality" is not however only limited to literary translation, but is — to a greater or lesser extent — the essence of any translator's dilemma.

For two thousand years translation theory (some call it "traditional," others now dismiss it as "prescientific") was concerned only with outstanding works of art. For the last forty years "translation science," or translatology, has been trying to establish itself as a new discipline focussing on an undefined and idealized "common core" of general language, but with concepts that in effect apply only to technical terminology. Literary language was excluded as being "deviant," inaccessible to scientific analysis.

This study is an attempt to bridge the gap. It is not (as the reader familiar with recent developments in translation theory might possibly infer from the title) a study on literary translation; it is rather an attempt to present recently developed concepts and methods, both from translation theory and linguistics, in such a way that they could be usefully employed in the theory, practice and analysis of literary translation.

This presupposes some radical changes in thinking: firstly, in conceptualization and categorization, and secondly in the approach to translation itself. The age-old polarized dichotomy (such as word vs. sense, which dominated traditional translation theory ever since Cicero) and the classical box-like category of objectivist and reductionist tradition (such as neatly

delimited text-types and rigid equivalence-types, which paralyzed the development of the linguistically oriented translatology) have been replaced by a holistic, gestalt-like principle based on prototypes dynamically focussed at points on a cline (cf. p. 32 and p. 89). In this way, the multi-dimensional character of language with its dynamic tension of paradoxes and seemingly conflicting forces becomes the basis for translation. Secondly, the idea must be abandoned that translation is merely a matter of isolated words, an *idée fixe* that characterized work on translation until quite recently (even with such enlightened scholars as Roman Jakobson and Jiří Levý): in our concept translation begins with the text-in-situation as an integral part of the cultural background, whereby text-analysis proceeds from the macro-structure of the text to the micro-unit of the word, this being seen, not as an isolatable item, but in its relevance and function within the text. Furthermore, the text cannot be considered as a static specimen of language (an idea still dominant in practical translation classes), but essentially as the verbalized expression of an author's intention as understood by the translator as reader, who then recreates this whole for another readership in another culture. This dynamic process explains why new translations of literary works are constantly in demand, and why *the* perfect translation does not exist.

The demand that translation studies should be viewed as an independent discipline — an idea that goes back to Nida's work in the 1960's — has come from several quarters in recent years, from such academically-minded translation scholars as Susan Bassnett-McGuire (*Translation Studies*, 1980) to practitioners such as Hartmut Lange ("Begegnung zwischen Praxis und Lehre. Ein BDÜ Symposium," *MDÜ* 1984/1). Up to now however no substantial attempt has been made to specify the content of such an independent discipline which would include both literary and special language translation. This study is intended as a step in that direction. In other words, it is essentially a study in the theory and practice of translation; it can only indirectly be assigned to the field of literary studies in that it is concerned with literary translation, and it is not intended to be a contribution to the discipline of linguistics. As will emerge during the course of the following chapters, translation studies, as a culturally oriented subject, draws on a number of disciplines, including psychology (1.3), ethnology (2.1) and philosophy (2.1), without being a subdivision of any of them. Similarly, it can and should utilize relevant concepts and methods developed from the study of language (this despite massive misgivings on the part of scholars in

literary translation, cf. 1.2.4 below) without automatically becoming a branch of linguistics or having to adopt linguistic methods and theoretical constructs wholesale. Linguistics is concerned with the theory and description of language for its own sake, translation studies with the theory and description of recreating concrete texts, whether literary, specialized or general. What is therefore important for translation studies is the *usability* of the method, the *potential* within a concept, and this must be both broad enough to have general validity and flexible enough to be adapted to the individual — and often idiosyncratic — text. As by no means all linguistic concepts and methods are relevant to translation, it is clear that — as with any interdisciplinary work — a specific selection must be made. This is not however identical with haphazard eclecticism, and it means that work in the field of translation cannot aim at following the course of discussions within the discipline of linguistics where these have no direct bearing on translation theory or practice. Presupposing such limitations therefore, this study presents some concepts and methods from linguistics which have shown themselves to be relevant for translation, and they are here further developed for use in translation studies.

Chapter I presents a conception of text, language and categorization as the basis for an independent, integrated discipline of translation studies embracing the whole spectrum of language, whether literary, "ordinary" or "general" language, or language for special purposes. First, the approach to be adopted here is situated against the conceptual background of both traditional and modern translation theory, and a detailed explanation is given of why the concept of equivalence — as a term, as a notion and in its innumerable different usages — is an unsuitable basis for an integrated theory of translation. The principle of the gestalt and the concept of the prototypology are then presented as alternatives to traditional forms of categorization, and they are exemplified in an integrated theoretical model which relates textual prototypes to those criteria relevant for them in translation.

Chapter 2 presents the notion of translation, not as a mere transcoding process as in linguistically oriented translatology, but as a cross-cultural event. Recent translation theories based on this view are discussed (2.2) and some new ideas and concepts are put forward: language — not as a Saussurean dichotomy of *langue* and *parole* — but as a spectrum of system, norm and text, whereby the three prototypical concepts interact in a constant dynamic tension. This is then illustrated on the basis of language

dimension and cultural *perspective* in literary translation — with example from Stoppard and Lewis Carroll — and special attention is paid to the problem of translating metaphor (with an example from Thomas Mann).
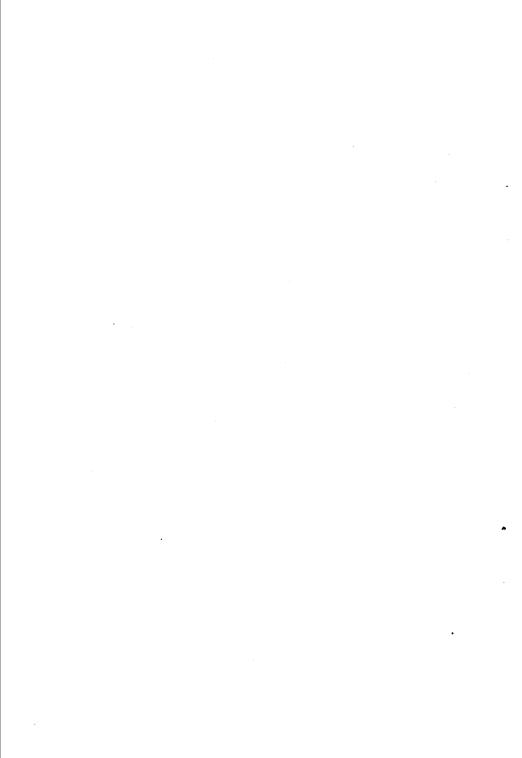
In Chapter 3 some theories and concepts from linguistics are presented, and illustrated by examples, in their potential relevance for translation. First, a macro-level analysis is demonstrated on the basis of a brief sketch by Somerset Maugham, whereby the concept of *field progression* has been developed from text-linguistics (Greimas' concept of the *isotope* and Stolze's method of analyzing semantic fields in the text). In 3.3 Fillmore's scenes-and-frames semantics is discussed as a basis for the understanding and recreation of the text by the translator, whereby the linguistic *frame* interacts with the experiential *scene* behind the text. In 3.4 the speech act theory of Austin and Searle is applied in a contrastive model showing structural differences in German and English public directives, and finally, the dynamic adjective (3.5), in an extended semantic definition, is analyzed as a basic source of difficulty for the translator. Here the tension between norm and text becomes especially clear, and the analysis serves as a basis for reconsidering the traditional methods of bilingual lexicography; the chapter closes with a discussion of the varying interlingual relationships as an alternative to the often misleading dictionary equivalent.

Chapter 4 takes a broad view at the spectrum of text-types from special to literary language, in their relevance for translation. A closer look at the situation of the source text and the function of the translation (cf. 2.2) shows that the status of the literary source text is higher than with most other text-types. Similarly, the factor of style — as individual choice versus group convention — is more decisive in literary translation than with special or general language. By way of conclusion, Chapter 5 takes a look at the future and offers a tentative prognosis for translation studies as an independent discipline.

As far as possible, the concepts presented here are illustrated by examples, some literary (Stoppard, Thomas Mann, Lawrence Durrell, Dylan Thomas), others are extracts from newspaper articles to illustrate phenomena common to both literary and general language. Three of the four texts discussed in Chapter 4 are from the author's own workshop; they are presented, not as "model translations" in the global sense (a concept rejected by modern translation theory) but as concrete assignments serving a specific function within a given situation.

At present, translation is a topic which anyone and everyone professes

to know about and a craft which many laymen with a smattering of foreign languages think they can master. This study is a contribution to those many efforts now being made to rouse awareness for what most professional translators know their metier to be: a skill demanding utmost proficiency, specialized knowledge and the sensitivity of an artist, which — like other activities of its kind — should be left to the expert.

1. Translation studies as an independent discipline

1.1 Translation and traditional language study

The study of foreign languages and literatures is firmly anchored in the Western university tradition. Perspective and focus vary from one country to another, but the basic pattern is recognizable almost everywhere: each department concentrates on one foreign language and the literature written in it (this is typical of the British system and where English is studied as a foreign language) or on a group of languages and their respective literatures, such as the Romance or Slavonic languages (this being typical of Continental universities and to some extent of those in North America).[1] Traditionally, such departments have developed independently of each other and are themselves divided into two clear sections, one concerned with the study of literature and the other with the study of language. In recent years, university reform and the foundation of new universities have in some countries led to a reshuffling of the traditional departments, resulting on the one hand in Language Centres and on the other in Institutes of Comparative Literature;[2] in this way the compartmentalization of the various language subjects has been overcome, but the rift between the study of language and the study of literature has been deepened.

It is this rift that has always characterized the theory of translation and even today still dominates translation studies. In practice of course texts of all kinds have been translated since the scribal activities of Old Babylonia over three thousand years ago,[3] but translation theory was limited until quite recently to cultural monuments such as the Bible or the works of Classical Antiquity, as well as outstanding works of literature, particularly poetry and drama. Translated texts from everyday life were studied, if at all, merely as specimens of language at a given stage of development,[4] and traditional philology did not concern itself with translation theory.

During the course of the last thirty years however, the study of language has undergone radical changes: the focus of interest has widened

from the purely historical to the contemporary, from the prescriptive to the descriptive, from the theoretical system to the concrete realization, from the micro-level of the sign to the macro-structure of the text. The combined impact of these developments facilitated the emergence of a linguistically oriented translation theory, which, particularly in Germany — with the integration of the former "Dolmetscherschulen" into the universities — established itself as the new academic subject of *Übersetzungswissenschaft*, or translatology.

The status of the new discipline is however still uncertain, and in the traditional language departments it is at best known from hearsay. Even the historically oriented theories of literary translation remain exotic material, rarely taught and virtually unknown. For most students of foreign languages, the subject of translation is limited to "practical" translation exercises, a relic from the heyday of Latin classes in schools and now a highly disputed method of foreign language teaching,[5] whereby a text — or rather a text fragment — has to be rendered sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase in the foreign language. With this background it is hardly surprising that translation has such low status and translation theory is viewed with such scepticism in academic circles.

The starting point of our study therefore represents the very opposite of our ultimate aim. At present the subject of translation, especially as it is seen in the traditional language departments, is fragmented and disconnected: the different languages are taught in separate departments, literature and language are represented by different professors, translation theory, whether literary or linguistic, is barely known, and translation practice is relegated entirely to the low-level status of practical language teaching.

1.2 Literary and linguistic orientations

Traditional translation theory has been intensively investigated, and it is not the aim of this study to go into it in detail. Störig (1973) provides a cross-section of the main contributions from St Jerome to the present day, including those of Luther, Goethe, Schleiermacher, Buber and Benjamin. Of the diverse historical reviews of translation and translation theory, Mounin (1967) remains a classic with one of the first connecting links to modern theory, while Kelly (1979) presents a broad survey, interweaving various linguistic approaches. For the most part, such well-trodden ground

lies outside the field of the present study: the aim of the following histori-cal outline is rather to trace the underlying concepts of and attitudes towards translation through the relevant periods of its development.

1.2.1 *The dichotomy of word and sense*

By far the most influential concept in the history of translation is that age-old dichotomy of word and sense, which traditional translation theory never managed to overcome, and which still besets translation studies today.

It was Cicero in the first century BC who departed from the dogma that translation necessarily consisted of a word-for-word rendering and who so eloquently formulated the alternative: "Non ut interpres ... sed ut orator" (Mounin 1967:24). For the next two thousand years translation theory was mainly limited to a heated discussion of this dichotomy, the pendulum of current opinion swinging from one side to the other. In Bible translation, with the deep-seated belief in the sacred Word of God, the absolute criterion was the literal word of the original, and this explains Jerome's defensive attitude when he declares in his letter (57) to Pam-machius, consciously opposing the dogma of the time:

> Ego enim non solum fateor, sed libera voce profiteor me in interpretatione Graecorum absque scripturus sanctis, ubi et verborum ordo misterium est, *non verbum e verbo sed sensum exprimere de sensu.*
>
> (1980:13, emphasis added)

Well over a thousand years later, in 1530, Luther was to fight a similar bat-tle with the Church authorities of his time over the translation of the Bible into German. He defended the same basic principle as Jerome, but his words were a good deal more aggressive, as emerges from the celebrated passage in his *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen*:

> Denn man muß nicht die Buchstaben in der lateinischen Sprache fragen, wie man soll Deutsch reden, wie diese Esel tun, sondern man muß die Mutter im Hause, die Kinder auf der Gassen, den gemeinen Mann auf dem Markt drum fragen, und denselbigen auf das Maul sehen, wie sie reden und darnach dolmetschen; da verstehen sie es denn und merken, daß man deutsch mit ihnen redet.
>
> (cit. Störig 1973:21)

The debate over the varying merits of the "faithful" and the "free" —
the latter culminating in the "belles infidèles," or the free adaptations

popular in France — continued to rage in Europe (Mounin 1967: 42ff.), and it found eloquent expression in Germany during the early years of the 19th century, when translation blossomed again with the Romantic movement. On 24 June 1813 Schleiermacher read his much-quoted treatise "Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersezens" to the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin, culminating in the maxim:

> Entweder der Uebersezer läßt den Schriftsteller möglichst in Ruhe, und bewegt den Leser ihm entgegen; oder er läßt den Leser möglichst in Ruhe und bewegt den Schriftsteller ihm entgegen. Beide sind so gänzlich von einander verschieden, daß durchaus einer von beiden so streng als möglich muß verfolgt werden, aus jeder Vermischung aber ein höchst unzuverlässiges Resultat nothwendig hervorgeht, und zu besorgen ist daß Schriftsteller und Leser sich gänzlich verfehlen.
>
> (cit. Störig 1973:47)

The emphasis has shifted now from the categoric "not ... but" to the more tolerant alternative "either ... or," but the rigid dichotomy remains, and Schleiermacher makes it clear in his treatise that he favours the method of *Verfremdung*, or translation that is "faithful" to the original. As the contributions in Störig's anthology show, the debate continued well into the 20th century, the most extreme case being presented by Benjamin (1923), who returns to the concept of the "heiliger Text" and declares that the interlinear version of the Bible is the ideal of all translation (Störig 1973:169). In southern Europe equally drastic conclusions were drawn, by Croce (1902) and by Ortega y Gasset (1973), who maintained that ultimately translation is an "impossible undertaking."[6]   Despite such admissions of resignation and despair however, it still remains an indisputable fact that translation has been going on, and much of it successfully, throughout European civilization. What was wrong was rather the nature of the theory itself with its onesided and absolute demands, as well as the limitations imposed by the material. Both the Bible and the great works of Classical Antiquity rather represent special cases of translation than a broad basis on which to build a theory of general validity — and such a theory was hindered by a deliberate and artificial reduction of the field of study. Another clear-cut dichotomy established by Schleiermacher in the same treatise — and still upheld in translation studies today — was that between "das eigentliche Uebersezen" and his conception of "das bloße Dolmetschen," meaning, not the specialized activity of conference interpreting as it is understood today, but the translation, both written and oral, of everyday texts on matters of business, law and administration, which