translation STUDIES

Contemporary Translation Theories

Edwin Gentzler

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General editors' preface

The growth of Translation Studies as a separate discipline is a success story of the 1980s. The subject has developed in many parts of the world and is clearly destined to continue developing well into the twenty-first century. Translation Studies brings together work in a wide variety of fields, including linguistics, literary study, history, anthropology, psychology, and economics. This series of books will reflect the breadth of work in Translation Studies and will enable readers to share in the exciting new developments that are taking place at the present time.

Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live.

Since this series of books on Translation Studies is the first of its kind, it will be concerned with its own genealogy. It will publish texts from the past that illustrate its concerns in the present, and will publish texts of a more theoretical nature immediately addressing those concerns, along with case studies illustrating manipulation through rewriting in various literatures. It will be comparative in nature and will range through many literary

traditions both Western and non-Western. Through the concepts of rewriting and manipulation, this series aims to tackle the problem of ideology, change, and power in literature and society and so assert the central function of translation as a shaping force.

Susan Bassnett
André Lefevere

Preface

The formulation of this project began in the early 1980s at the International Writing Program (IWP) at the University of Iowa, where I worked on translations of poems and short stories and helped arrange panel discussions on the literary situation in various countries around the world. Because Iowa houses not only outstanding English and foreign language departments, but also the famed Writers' Workshop, the IWP members were seldom at a loss for an audience. Fiction and poetry readings at local bookstores as well as the panel discussions at the school were invariably crowded. Yet while creative writers, graduate students, and faculty respectfully attended and listened to the IWP presentations, the international writers' work remained a curiosity rather than an integral part of the literary community, often referred to by students and professors alike as "minor" or "secondary" – separate and to a large degree unequal.

The reception of the foreign writers' work, in turn, did affect the nature of the International Writing Program's translation work. The desire of many international writers to be translated, published, and valued in English was enormous. While some measure of acceptability was gained in Iowa City and at certain university campuses in the United States, it was almost impossible to place translations in mainstream literary journals. The visiting writers reacted differently to such cultural disinterest. Some members, who had arrived in the United States eager to read, to talk, to exchange ideas and texts, withdrew because their work did not conform to the norms governing current literary taste in this country. Generally, these IWP participants returned to their home countries, wrote an essay about their stay in the USA, and continued with writing projects intended for native audiences,

perhaps to return at a later date when conditions were more favorable. Other visiting writers recognized the problem and redirected their energies to conform to thematics and styles that might meet a more favorable reception – but at certain costs. By rewriting texts to "appeal" to Western audiences, certain themes, styles, modes of reference, and referents themselves were elided from the texts translated. Those "silences" in the text, often known only to the translator, were often not only the most interesting in terms of creativity, but also the most revealing with regard to cultural differences.

No matter how "good" our translations were, they would never conform to certain "literary" expectations of the audience, a "problem" that may be operative regardless of the originating and receiving cultures. After all, professors, editors, and creative writers make their living from perpetuating one set of literary values over another; as "objective" or as "open" as any literary establishment tries to be, tastes are conditioned, and certain economies predominate. Though language and cultural constraints in America seem enormous, the possibility of challenging norms and creating new forms of expression is always present. At those rare moments when cultural barriers disappear and an international writer meets with success, the "double constitution" of the act of translation becomes visible. Such a "theory" motivated the translation work at Iowa and led to my investigation of other "theories" of translation for this book.

Paul and Hualing Nieh Engle, Co-Founders and Directors of the International Writing Program, knew well the socio-political restrictions governing the context in which translations occur, and devoted their lives to breaking down such barriers. With their influence in mind, I attempt in this book to focus not just on various translation theories, but also on the "political realities" that surround the practice of literary translation, and include them in respective discussions. One of the goals of the book is to raise questions concerning the way literary translations are studied in the West and to help readers rethink conceptually how translations are defined and categorized. I thank the Engles, Peter and Mary Nazareth, Daniel Weissbort, the IWP staff, all the visiting writers, and the University of Iowa for their unswaying commitment to promoting translation and for their ongoing efforts to effect international communication.

Sincere thanks go to Hans-Joachim Shulz, Director of the Comparative Literature Program at Vanderbilt University, not only for allowing me to a large degree to create my own curriculum in pursuit of a fairly wide range of literary and theoretical interests, many of which form the basis for sections of the book, but also for his friendship and trust. Eugene Van Erven, a colleague in the Comparative Literature Program at Vanderbilt and former Director of McTyeire International House, shared my belief in the relevance of international creative writing, especially that of popular political poetry, to academic pursuits. His involvement in and support of many of my "extra-curricular" projects was invaluable. Much of the pleasure I had in the writing of this book was derived from the discussions I had with fellow students during the formative stages of each section; particular thanks go to those students in Charles Scott's seminars on Continental Philosophy at Vanderbilt, especially Gene DiMagno, and to those students in Donald Davie's Pound seminar. Professors Alice Harris and Frantisek Galan, from the Linguistics Department and Comparative Literature Program at Vanderbilt, provided valuable comments on the manuscript. English professors Jack Prostko, Phyllis Frus, and Mark Jarman, also at Vanderbilt, not only read and responded positively to the text, but also included me in their circle of friends, making Nashville a warmer place to work.

Special thanks go to Maria Tymoczko at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst for her meticulous reading of the original manuscript and for encouragement and intellectual companionship during revisions. Conversations with the staff and participants in the 1991 CERA Summer Seminar for Translation, Communication, and Cultures at the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium, were also very helpful during the final stage. The lectures given by Susan Bassnett, 1991 CERA Professor and this series' co-editor, in Leuven proved very thought-provoking; she also gave me valuable feedback on some of the more controversial sections which follow. Series co-editor André Lefevere's unique interest in translation theory and his incisive suggestions made the entire publication process pleasurable. Publisher Janice Price supported the project from its earliest stage through to its final form.

Most importantly, Janet Gentzler Studer and Marianne Gentzler provided love and affection throughout the writing process.

Megan Gentzler's love, creativity, and companionship renewed my energy during critical phases. And finally, my gratitude for Jenny Spencer's love, intellectual engagement, and unwavering confidence, extends beyond words.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

"Translation Theory" is and is not a new field; though it has existed only since 1983 as a separate entry in the *Modern Language Association International Bibliography*, it is as old as the tower of Babel. Some literary scholars claim never to have heard of it as a subject in and of itself; others, who may themselves translate, claim to know all that they need to know. Anyone working "monolinguistically" may purport no need for translation theory; yet translation inheres in every language by its relationships to other signifying systems both past and present. Although considered a marginal discipline in academia, translation theory is central to anyone interpreting literature; in an historical period characterized by the proliferation of literary theories, translation theory is becoming increasingly relevant to them all.

What is "contemporary translation theory"? Roman Jakobson breaks the field down into three areas: *intralingual* translation, a rewording of signs in one language with signs from the same language; *interlingual* translation, or the interpretation of signs in one language with signs from another language (translation "proper"); and *intersemiotic* translation, or the transfer ("transmutation") of the signs in one language to non-verbal sign systems (from language into art or music). All of Jakobson's fields mutually reinforce each other, and, accepting this definition, one can easily see how translation theory can quickly enmesh the student in the entire intersemiotic network of language and culture, one touching on all disciplines and discourses. I will be concerned mostly with the second aspect of Jakobson's definition – *interlingual* translation – but I hope to demonstrate as well that such isolation is impossible, and that even translation "proper" entails multiple linguistic, literary, and cultural aspects.

In recent years, translation theory has exploded with new developments. George Steiner characterized the history of translation theory until Jakobson as a continual rehashing of the same formal (consistent with the form of the original) versus free (using innovative forms to simulate the original's intent) theoretical distinction. "Modern" translation theory, like current literary theory, begins with structuralism and reflects the proliferation of the age. The following chapters focus on just five different approaches to translation that began in the mid-sixties and continue to be influential today: (1) the American translation workshop; (2) the "science" of translation; (3) early Translation Studies; (4) Polysystem theory and Translation Studies; and (5) deconstruction.

Given the marginal status of translation theory within literary studies, I have assumed that the reader has had little previous exposure to the theories presented here. The investigations themselves differ greatly, a fact reflected in the terminology specific to each field as well as in the ideas themselves. Literary translators, for example, distance themselves from the "jargon" of linguistic approaches; deconstructionists subvert the very "scientific" terminology demanded by semioticians; and the aggressive rhetoric of the deconstructionists alienates scholars from many of the other fields. Of necessity, each of the following chapters conforms in a gradual way to the preferred terminology within the branch of study, for certain ideas are dependent upon the terms used to describe them.

In addition to terminological differences, however, other barriers have impeded the exchange of ideas among scholars of various approaches. Despite the fact that proponents of "new" approaches such as Translation Studies have been developing their ideas and publishing their data for over two decades, their ideas remain foreign to more traditionally based approaches. Euro-American translators, for example, generally resist the suggestion that institutional manipulation influences translation. Translation Studies scholars do not relish the idea that their meticulously collected data may be interpreted by deconstructionists to reveal multiple gaps and literary repression rather than systematic literary evolution. Interdisciplinary translation conferences have been held, but many incompatabilities remain; one of the purposes of this study is to show how such problems in

communication and exchange are grounded in the differing theoretical assumptions of each approach.

An attempt has also been made to read symptomatically, to look at the "discourse" of the given text, and to point out what can and cannot be said given the philosophical premises of the scholar. For example, after reviewing Eugene Nida's religious presuppositions and missionary goals, I find that his adoption of a deep structure/surface structure model derived from "modern" linguistics as a base upon which to found his "science" highly suspect. What he means by "deep" structure – something vague and related to the Word of God – and what Noam Chomsky intended – again, something vague, but related to innate structures of the human brain – are two different concepts. Often the theoretical assumptions are less overt than those of Nida, but still can be discerned by the terminology, rhetoric, and style chosen by a particular scholar. Thus when early Translation Studies scholars adopt concepts such as "literariness," "estrangement," "primary," and "secondary," I find the terms themselves reveal assumptions about the hierarchical nature of a culture. While such terms may help the translation scholar articulate the way translations function in a society, they may also serve to inhibit the nature of the investigation.

Given this methodology, original sources have proven more valuable than the secondary literature, most of which comes from "outside" a translation-oriented or even a comparative discipline, or, in other words, from within the particular discipline – be it literary theory, linguistics, or philosophy. Instead, by returning to the "original" source, I can analyze not just what the text explicitly says, but also what it does *not* say or says only by implication. For example, when Jonas Zdanys, Translation Workshop Director at Yale, says that he avoids "predetermined aesthetic theories" and then later talks about his commitment to "creative solitude," or, even more revealing, talks about his hoping to convert a linguistics student to his beliefs, I suggest that he has his own predetermined yet unspoken agenda. Or when I. A. Richards first argues in *Practical Criticism* that he is looking for a new theory allowing individuals to discover themselves and to discover new methods, and then turns around, dismisses the varied responses of his students as errors, and argues that the goal also is to achieve "perfect understanding" and a unified and correct response, I suggest his argument is less than consistent.

Some of the "precursors"' work may or may not have been intended for translation. Richards, for example, was clearly teaching students techniques for learning the English canon, yet translation workshops in the United States use New Critical methods to interpret and evaluate translations. Richards' approach – whether consciously or unconsciously – remains at the heart of classroom. Chomsky did not intend his model to be used for translation, but Nida and Wolfram Wilss – director of a translation institute in Saarbrücken – have incorporated, correctly or incorrectly, aspects of Chomsky's model in their work, and thus the translation scholar must ask those hard, and sometimes unfair, questions regarding the suitability of a particular model for translation theory. Others have spoken directly to issues of translation. Late Russian Formalists such as Jurij Tynjanov and Roman Jakobson allowed for translation as well as other cultural phenomena in their theory of art, but infrequently expanded upon specifics. Questions regarding the nature of translation are always underlying the movement of the thought driving Heidegger's and Derrida's work, and thus color a subsequent generation of "scholars." Yet in many ways some of Derrida's terminology seems dated in light of recent translation theory – such as his reference to the "impossibility" of translation – and the Translation Studies scholar must point out the progress which has been made.

In general, I am greatly encouraged by developments in the field of "modern" translation theory. The focus in translation investigation is shifting from the abstract to the specific, from the deep underlying hypothetical forms to the surface of texts with all their gaps, errors, ambiguities, multiple referents, and "foreign" disorder. These are being analyzed – and not by standards of equivalent/inequivalent, right/wrong, good/bad, and correct/incorrect. Such standards imply notions of substantialism that limit other possibilities of translation practice, marginalize unorthodox translation, and impinge upon real intercultural exchange. As is true in literary theory in general, a revaluation of our standards is well underway, and within the field of translation theory substantialist notions are already beginning to dissipate (though no doubt they will die slowly). For literary history, translation case studies are already proving a valuable resource showing how cultural ideology directly influences specific literary decisions. For literary theory, this may very well be an exciting

time of renewed study of *actual* texts from a new discipline, which can only help us gain increased insight into not only the nature of translation, but the nature of language and (international) communication as well. Yet, my optimism is tempered by the feeling that all the translation theories discussed in this text reflect certain values and aesthetic assumptions about literature as understood by Western critics. As the translation theories outlined in this book become more and more complex, they seem to gain more and more support from academia, which, in turn, also enhances their power to exclude.

Chapter 2

The American translation workshop

THE BOOM IN LITERARY TRANSLATION

In many academic circles in America, literary translation is still considered secondary activity, mechanical rather than creative, neither worthy of serious critical attention nor of general interest to the public. Translators, too, frequently lament the fact that there is no market for their work and that what does get published is immediately relegated to the margins of academic investigation. Yet a closer analysis of the developments over the last three decades reveals that in some circles literary translation has been drawing increasing public and academic interest.

In the early sixties, there were no translation workshops at institutions of higher learning in the United States. Translation was a marginal activity at best, not considered by academia as a proper field of study in the university system. In his essay "The State of Translation," Edmund Keeley, director of translation workshops first at Iowa and later at Princeton, wrote, "In 1963 there was no established and continuing public forum for the purpose: no translation centres, no associations of literary translators as far as I know, no publications devoted primarily to translations, translators, and their continuing problems" (Keeley, 1981: 11; qtd. by Weissbort, 1983: 7). In this environment, Paul Engle, Director of the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, gave the first heave; arguing that creative writing knows no national boundaries, he expanded the Creative Writing Program to include international writers. In 1964 Engle hired a full-time director for what was the first translation workshop in the United States and began offering academic credit for literary translations. The following year the Ford Foundation conferred a $150,000 grant on the University of Texas at Austin toward the