[«The Notion of Constraint in Translation»]
[«La notion de contrainte en traduction»]

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I shall be dealing with the part translation plays in teaching, not just in the teaching of languages, or even literatures, but in that self-reflection of a culture which is the basis of all teaching, since teaching is, after all, the transmission of what a culture considers important. I shall not be dealing with the pedagogical aspects of translation, the training of translators as such, not only because many others have already done so, but also, I think, because restricting the topic in this way makes what I have to say needlessly restrictive. For the same reason, I shall not be talking specifically about the part translation has to play in the teaching of foreign languages, a matter much better left to linguistics, both contrastive and applied.

Since we have reached linguistics, let me make use of it the way many people have made use of it over the last decennia: analogically. Let me say that the relationship between theoretical linguistics on the one hand, contrastive and applied linguistics on the other, are very similar to the relationship between theory of translation and the training of translators. It is the task of theoretical linguistics to describe how languages work, not to formulate rules for good usage. In the same way, translation theory should describe how translation works, not try to formulate the rules leading to the production of good translations.

Theory of translation can mean two things: it can mean reflections on ways of translating well, but also on the ways in which translation(s) function(s) inside a culture. It would seem to me that if theoretical reflection starts on the first level mentioned, other levels tend to get lost from sight. If, on the other hand, you start from the second level, you have to keep all other levels in sight, as well. I shall be taking the second level as my starting point, to come up with certain conclusions that may be applicable to teaching, though not in the form of methodological guidelines. This strategy implies that I shall

be asking questions somewhat different from the questions that are normally asked in this type of paper. I shall not be asking "what is a translation?", since what things are is often determined by the way one tends to look at them, and since that way is, in itself, determined by historical, cultural, economic and psychological constraints.

What a translation and, a fortiori, a good translation is would, then, be defined inside a certain way of analysing things, a certain perspective. It doesn't take too much imaginative power to understand that people working within the same perspective will generally like what they produce, and generally dislike what others produce. Hence the eternal discussions, eternally unfruitful, which we are so familiar with in writings on translation. Hence also the rather low level of those discussions which may, in the end, be reduced to an argumentation that looks suspiciously like the "I'm right because you're wrong" type. Hence also that the identification of rules formulated within a certain perspective with theoretical reflection on translation as such, would condemn that reflection to utter stagnation. Theoretical reflection on translation should rather start with the perspectives, with what constitutes them, changes, dissolves them. The formulation of rules within one and the same perspective is, on the other hand, not unlike the many models of the translation process established inside the Bühler/Jakobson communication perspective, in which neatly drawn channels always link sender to receiver and in which the thickest line drawing the ultimate rectangle constitutes a more or less impassable barrier between what the translation is for, its (prospective) function and the more technical operations taking place inside that rectangle.

But does all this not mean that we are simply differing in the fundamental question? For where is the perspective that enables us to study other perspectives? There is only one more or less valid answer to this: you chose your perspective because you know the field, because you suspect what is promising and what is. not and because, in the end, you believe in it, believe, in other words, not that it's "true", but that it's "useful" in that it might increase our knowledge of the field of study we are dealing with. You do, in the end, gamble on a perspective, and it should be obvious that a perspective's usefulness varies in time: it diminishes and is superseded, which means that a more pragmatic element supplements the more "irrational" element of belief, and that the elaboration of a

perspective takes place in the field of tension between two poles, that of stagnation and that of utopia. And since we are never alone in our field, our perspective will be supplemented by others.

From my perspective, I can speak with a certain serenity, but I cannot give you recipes, hard and fast definitions, for the simple reason that things keep changing. I can only suggest certain patterns, as empty as possible, which will have to be field in the filed, the dialectical interaction between the pattern and the field being of the utmost importance. I shall, therefore, make use of flexible, "thick" descriptions, which do not catch the object, but circumscribe it, and which I'll call constraints, limitations of which you are conscious, which you can choose to go beyond, or not.

Let us start by remembering that the production of texts is subject to constraints in all cultures, and that it is possible to establish a hierarchy of those constraints, which I would call, in descending order of importance, patronage, text conventions, universe of discourse, language. Texts called translations have to deal with a fifth constraint, that of the source text. When I use the word "constraint" I do not want to suggest that everything works in a deterministic, mechanistic way, but simply that constraints function inside of what I would call, following C. S. Pierce, a "field of abduction", meaning the latitude which is given around social and grammatical rules, which enables users to vary them, and yet still to be understood. Think of the Dylan Thomas poem beginning with "Once under a time". In language use abduction stands for the domain of creativity, art, propaganda, lying and manipulation. It can never be explicitly defined and, what is more, it tends to upset many explicit classifications.

I must insist on the hierarchical order mentioned above, because translations are made to function in a certain way, a rather obvious fact in itself, but one that is often repressed by most students of translation, probably because students of translation tend to be linked in a personal union with teachers of translation, most of the time, which means that they only deal with translation in a classroom situation. This, in turn, often leads to an excessive attention being paid to the process of translation, and that process is never confronted with any real need to function outside the classroom, except once, for the final exam.

All cultures exhibit texts which are presented as translations of other texts, which claim to have been produced to function

instead of other texts which have been produced inside another culture, using another language. The first question to ask would then not be: "how do we translate texts?", but rather: "why is it that everybody' wants to establish rules for the activity called translation, and what are the consequences, not just for the production and reception of translations as such, but also for the development of whole cultures?" This question leads to other questions like: "for whom do you translate?", "who selects texts for translation, or even, who sees to it that nothing gets translated, as was the case in China between roughly the ninth and the nineteenth century?" Those questions deal with my first constraint. They try to identify the power of people, groups, institutions who order translations, encourage them, distribute them, discourage or burn them. They immediately suggest two fields of research: (a) what does one translate within a certain culture, and why? and (b) how do the master texts from other cultures get translated, the Bible, e.g., the Capital, Freud, Lao Tzu, with what aim 'in mind and what influence does the aim have on the means. These questions also imply that translations should not be studied in isolation, but as part of the global production of texts which takes place within a certain culture at a certain time. How are these translations received, what influence do they have on the image a certain culture makes for itself of other cultures? Let me take the example of the Bible translated by Martin Luther to illustrate the reductionism inherent in traditional contrastive analyses which limit themselves to the comparison of source and target text. During a number of years the same text circulated in Northern and in Southern Germany, in the North with the name of Martin Luther on the title page, in the South with another name, and also with another preface. The same text, with the wrong name and the wrong preface, would have been confiscated and burnt in both halves of Germany at that time.

It seems rather obvious, then, that one should not only analyse the translator's strategies, but also the strategies ensuring the distribution and, ultimately, the reception of translations. This hasn't been done much in the past, because one has consistently identified translation with the sole transfer of content, at least in theory, because that was the only way in which the theory could be kept more or less elegant and manageable, and also, unfortunately, more than less irrelevant. You always come back to the "literal" versus "free" problem as long as you don't ask the more fundamental question, like

who needs free translations, like-Nicholas Culpepper, e.g., who wanted to break the monopoly of the medical profession with his seventeenth century English translations of Galen, or who needs literal translations, like the translations of most books cultures consider sacred, and that either could not be translated for a long time, like the Koran, or had to be translated word for word, like the Bible.

It would seem, then, that the image a culture makes of itself is not only constructed on the basis of so-called "original" texts, but also, and maybe more so, on the basis of translated texts. Teaching would do well to take this fundamental fact into account. That it has not done so, can be explained, though not excused by cultural chauvinism, often reinforced by the romantic doctrine of genius and original creation in one of its variants. Students need to be shown that what we call "our" culture also consists of what "we" have translated. This would, again, ephasize the enormous importance of translation; it would also go a long way in teaching tolerance, mutual respect, cultural interdependence, relativism. One would then also realize that the influence certain master texts have on a culture is exerted through translation, often through abbreviated translations or even rather succinct versions. One would then do well to no longer study only texts that call themselves translations, but also texts of the type just mentioned, which I shall call refractions.

The most fundamental question of all would then deal with patronage, and one must realize that this word does not only carry positive connotations. Patronage is also capable of not selecting certain source texts, of not encouraging translations. The next question has to do with the part played by patronage in the culture as a whole. Patronage ensures the translator's Jivelihood, as long as he or she agrees to stay within certain ideological limits. The most important patronage in history is probably the one being exercised now in Africa, where the cultural policy of all newly independent states is trying to create a cultural heritage for states with extremely disparate populations, often, paradoxically, by translating the culturally diversified heritage into English, French or Portuguese.

In cultures with an undifferentiated patronage, i.e. in which patronage unites ideological, economic and status elements, translations tend towards a certain uniformity on the one hand, while playing a potentially subversive role on the other. Let me just draw attention to the great number of translations and refractions of English philosophers circulating in France

in the eighteenth century, with "Strassbourg" or "Amsterdam" as the fictitious place of publication on the title page, in order to escape royal censorship.

In cultures with differentiated patronage, in which a number of ideological tendencies compete, and in which social status and economic success do not necessarily imply each other, the translator has more choice, at least at first sight, both in selecting the texts to be translated and the way they will be translated. Let me add that patronage does not simply stand for a person, the absolute ruler often conjured up by the very word, but also for the editor, the church, the party, radio, television. It rarely interferes directly in the domain of translation. Its influence makes itself felt in indirect ways, by means of giving institutionalized positions to people who are expected to exercise a control function: the critic, the academic, the expert, the publisher, the chief of propaganda, TV and radio programmers. It therefore becomes more and more difficult, these days, to talk about the strategies used by certain translators: one is never sure of what the translator has done, and what has been the editor's responsibility.

Generally, the influence of patronage is to be found on the level of the selection of the source text and on the level of production. It would be wise to insist on this basic situation in teaching, not to moralise, to defend it or to try to change it, but simply to recognize it as such, and to recognize the extremely important part it plays with regard to the function of the translation. The translational strategy the translator adopts is not just a matter of his own choice, which explains a number of things, such as the existence of radically different translations of the same text, all claiming to be "faithful", and they all are, each in its own perspective.

On the level of the production of certain texts, the influence of the patron or patronage group sometimes makes itself felt in details that would seem, at first sight, devoid of all importance. Kelly' quotes the example of Théodore de Bèze, translator of the **Acts of the Apostles** from Greek into Latin**,** who translates the Greek "syn gynaiksi" (the group waiting for the risen Christ also consists of women) with the Latin "cum uxoribus suis" (with their wives), which is totally correct from the grammatical point of view, but which is immediately unmasked by George Campbell as a surreptitious attack against the doctrine of priestly celibacy. Needless to say, the influence of patronage appears to be more restricted on the level of the production of scientific and technological texts,

but certainly today that influence is very great on the level of the selection of those texts, a selection which often involves **waiting for a certain** time, or even stealing the original outright.

My second constraint is that of text conventions. The conventions governing the productions of philosophical texts, **e.g. in East and** West are rather different, but there are also .conventions which transcend different languages, such as literary **genres,** even if they acquire a sort of local colour in various languages. It appears to be generally acknowledged now that text conventions occupy the hierarchically first **position** during the production of texts, preceding grammatical conventions, e.g. When text conventions transcend individual languages, which is also the case in the translation of scientific texts, the translator may suppose that his audience knows 'those conventions, which would compensate the difference in languages. Readers of this text who do not speak Portuguese, but who have read a fair number of epic poems, will have little difficulty deciphering the first lines of OS lusiados; later on in the poem, when the plot becomes more important than the conventions, things get that much more difficult.

The translator can also consciously alienate the source text, for ideological reasons such as fidelity, e.g., or profit. Epic poems have been translated into prose in the nineteenth century for the first reason, and in the first half of the twentieth century for the second reason. Things get more complicated when the source text has been composed following conventions unknown to the target audience. The negative example in this case is that of Islamic literature, which has never been "received" in the West in the same positive way as Japanese and Chinese literatures, e.g., probably because the textual conventions are so different. Let me give the example of the French, English and German translations of the qasida, **the** canonized poem in Islamic literature. The qasida finds its unifying principle not in the thematic or the formal field, but simply in the,fact that a number of episodes have to be treated in a certain sequence: (1) the poet recognizes a former camp-site where he has been happy, and asks his companions to stop and weep with him (2) the poet remembers past happiness, usually in love (3) the poet sings his own praises, both as a poet and a lover (4) the poet eulogizes his patron (5) a description of nature. Translators into the three languages mentioned above went looking for what resembled the qasida most in their own cultures, and came up with the "ode", each in their own language. The qasidas were, accordingly, translated

as "odes", which made their reception difficult, because they were neither qasidas, nor odes in translation.

Examples of this kind also serve to point out the essentially Europocentric character of all reflection on translation, a paradox at a time when translation from European into non-European languages is much greater in volume than translation from one European language into another. In teaching one should resolutely go against this Eurocentrism, which perpetuates a mental attitude which could be described as non-productive, ,to say the least, and which leads to further reductionism in thinking.

Teaching should also clearly show that nobody ever speaks or writes in complete freedom, at least if they want to be listened to read and understood. The way people talk is strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors. The aim seems to impose the means, or at least to suggest them very strongly, without leaving too many alternatives. Language is therefore not, in the first place, the creative "logos" hermeneutics talks about; in fact, language is very rarely used on that level. On the contrary, textual conventions offer themselves to the person who speaks or writes, and the choice of a text convention implies submission to the rules regulating that text convention, at least within a reasonable margin of abduction.

The teaching of languages should, therefore, be complemented by the teaching of text conventions; students should be exposed to text conventions that are not theirs, because they belong to other cultures, but also because they belong to previous stages in the evolution of their own culture. Once again translation would inject a moment of alienation into teaching: when we become aware of the fact that our way of constructing texts is not the only possible one, that others construct them in totally different ways, and that texts constructed in those ways have been able to function as master texts in their own cultures, we are likely to be less convinced of our own superiority.

We need to study text conventions in different cultures, and especially the influence those conventions exert on the target text, in combination with ideological factors. In the nineteenth century it is clear, e.g. that the European translator felt superior to texts belonging to different cultures. The result has been a very pronounced naturalisation, during which the text conventions of the source culture have been totally replaced by those of the target culture the translator considered analogous, without a word of explanation, but also, very often,

with the most honourable intentions. In this way, many a French colonial administrator in Africa translated the stories his "natives" told him, and in which animals played a big part, as fables in the way of La Fontaine. Which brings us face to face again with another old problem, which isn't really one: are we still dealing with translation, or are we in the realm of adaptation? The problem remains a problem only if one does not want to admit the hierarchical position of patronage and text conventions, if one remains convinced that the translator translates word for word, sentence for sentence, but never text for text, if one ignores the fact that the translator first choses a set of text conventions, and that this choice is also influenced, at least in part, by ideological motivations, since the same source text can be "moulded" in different text conventions in different ideological climates. Recent translations of black African stories, e.g., made by Africans, go out of their way to emphasize that these stories have nothing whatever in common with La Fontaine.

My third. constraint is that of the "universe of discourse", the knowledge of the-world, or a world, that is at the disposal of the reader, the listener, and of which the author makes use. Translation points up the differences in different universes of discourse. Many decisions are taken on this level, but they are also linked with the other two levels mentioned above. The ideological constraint plays prominently in the relationship that exists between the source and the target culture: is it a relationship of equality; or is one considered superior to the other? On this level one has to look for the motivation behind the use of calques, loan translations, notes and introductions.

The universe of discourse does not only consist of people or objects, but also of texts and ideas, and many other elements, hence the problems arising when it becomes necessary to translate quotations, proverbs, allusions and parodies. As a heuristic construct, the concept of universe of discourse also seems able to solve the false problem of the discordance in "connotation" and "denotation" of scientific and technical texts as compared with other types of texts. Scientific and technical texts are different because the universe of discourse they make use of is not only more restricted, but also because it is already "international", as the result of historical evolution. And that evolution is also taking place in other types of texts, under our very eyes: texts concerned with popular music, e.g., or with the drug subculture.

Nobody ever fully masters the potential universe of discourse offered by various cultures. The best way to introduce a foreign universe of discourse, would, therefore, be via the foreign language which acts as a repository for it, but it would be wise, in that case, to also judiciously emphasize the "foreignness" of the language, not to reduce the teaching to the establishment of a basic vocabulary and a set of grammatical rules. We do, in other words, have to reconquer a whole field that has become lost to linguistics ever since the first generation of Indogermanists, and which is only now beginning to be recovered by pragmatics and sociolinguistics which dare to think, once more, that it is the task of linguistics to also deal with the universe of discourse inside the language, and not only with the rules, transformational or otherwise. Teaching could and should use language as a means of revealing the existence of other universes of discourse.

Language is, of course, my fourth constraint, the one that has, for too long a time, been identified with translation studies in general. I do not have much to say about it, mainly because so much has been said and repeated about it already. I would simply want to draw attention to the difference between the locutionary and the illocutionary levels on which language operates. The locutionary level is that of the formation of well-formed sentences, in other words, that of rules and grammaticalness, in still other words the level that has to do with language learning and contrastive linguistics. not with theoretical thinking on translation. Translation studies should concentrate on the illocutionary level, where language is used to obtain a certain effect; where a number of strategies are developed in order to obtain an illocutionary effect in the target language which is similar to the illocutionary effect in the source language. This similarity does, obviously, not reside in the mechanical matching of means of expression (words, sentences) used in the source language with their target language counterparts. This is where the problems of style, register, linguistic variants, dialects and idiolects arise. The Romans already knew that translation, introduced on a certain level of competence, is the best way, not to learn a new language, but certainly to learn how to handle it as effectively as possible.

We are now left with the fifth constraint, that of the text to be translated. Here, too, I can be relatively brief, because the text is the locus where the other constraints clash, mix, mingle. Different translators will attach a different degree of

importance to different constraints, owing to their own situation inside their own culture. I hope to have made clear that this is a normal situation, and that, in acting in that way, translators are neither monsters, nor traitors, nor even imbeciles. It would seem to me that teaching needs to draw more attention to the translator and his or her task, and to the role he or she plays in different cultures.

Let me end by emphasizing, one last time, that the concept of constraint stands for the ultimate variable in all this, the human being, who may choose to submit to constraints or not. He or she may produce translations outside of the sphere of influence of a certain patronage, a certain ideology, inside or outside certain text-conventions. He or she can also naturalize a foreign universe of discourse or not, just as he or she can try to match the illocutionary force of the source text in a variety of ways. The study of these strategies is also part of theoretical thinking on translation, and the study of the dominant strategies of a certain period, such as the present, e.g., could be of great help in the practical training of translators.

We have come a long way away from trying to formulate rules which would enable us to decide what a good translation is and what not. I hope to have shown that we shall never be able to do that, and that we should not waste our time trying to solve problems that do not admit of simple solutions. These are precisely the problems which, by their very existence, can be made productive in thinking about language, literature, society, teaching.

NOTES

1. Kelly, *The True Interpreter***,** Oxford, Blackwell, 1979, p. 36.