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SOME MAJOR DATES AND EVENTS
IN THE
HISTORY OF TRANSLATION

ABSTRACT: THE SPEAKER will try to show some common threads in the history of translation or at least some modern parallels with more ancient examples. As for instance the perils of translating from Sumerian into Hebrew, Sacred Egyptian into Classical Greek, or Aramaic into Arabic. Or the even greater physical perils suffered by translators who have been murdered for their efforts, from a Persian interpreter executed by Themistocles, to French and English translators burnt at the stake by religious conservatives, to the forced suicide of Walter Benjamin in Spain. to the assassination of Hitoshi Igarashi, Salman Rushdie's Japanese translator. Voltaire' s translation of Hamlet's soliloquy into rhymed Racinian alexandrine couplets will be compared and contrasted with the problems of translating into and out of other "Public Presentation Languages," such as the epigrammatic four-character maxims of Chinese philosophy, poetry, and medicine. The work of a remarkable Iberian who long ago invented the first relational data base and also sought to intervene between Christianity and Islam by translating his own works into Arabic will be described, as will the career of Xuanzang, perhaps the best-known translator in the world. After a brief glance at the Persian translation academy of Jundishapur and the convergence at Toledo, the presentation will close with an attempt to characterize the past fifty years in translation, which have witnessed our field's greatest outgrowth but have also seen the development of some curious beliefs concerning linguistics and machine translation.

Some other examples of the speaker's research into translation history can be found on his website at: http://language.home.sprynet.com/trandex.htm#tranhist

His most recent piece, which includes a review of a Spanish book about terminology, appears online in Translation Journal at: http://accurapid.com/journal/30review2.htm

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What follows is an English translation of the author's introduction to this paper, written in Spanish for this occasion.

Professors, Translators, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Since I'm going to present the major part of this paper in English, I would like to say a few words in Spanish by way of introduction. First of all, I am extremely grateful and honored that you have offered me this opportunity to speak about the history of translation. Five decades ago in Madrid, when I was working as a bilingual announcer for North American programming at Radio Nacional de España, in that era it's true that I could have said that I was capable of speaking perhaps a small part of the Castilian tongue. Today I can no longer truly boast of any such skill, and this is the reason why my presentation will be in a language where I feel more secure.

I'd also like to begin by apologizing a bit for my accent and all these perhaps somewhat comical lispings–what can I say?–it's simply the Spanish that I learned, and it's now a bit too late for me to change. I'd also like to apologize for something else, it could just be that during the next few days I will come to utter a word I believe is Spanish but that is in fact Italian. I spent some years in Spain and Italy, and to our ears the two languages are sufficiently similar that sometimes we get confused. If this should happen even a single time, I truly beg your forgiveness.

Various subjects overlap in the scholarly territory which I have researched, among them of course translation, both its practice and theory, but also a fair amount concerning linguistics, computers, artificial intelligence, and machine translation. Furthermore, I've always tried to integrate both western and oriental cultures in my studies, embracing both modern and traditional medicine, including that of China and other countries. As those of you who may have read or heard my paper on "Hermes the God of Translators and Interpreters" already know, I have always sought to place both translation and linguistics in one unified territory as a single study.

The path I have followed in these efforts has not always been easy. It has been the path of the independent scholar and researcher. This is almost a forbidden pathway in the modern academic world, where all subjects and all grad students must be specialized. During the 'Sixties there was a famous Canadian sociologist, Marshall McLuhan, who severely criticized this academic world and insisted that the university ought to promote and produce not merely specialists but also generalists. Such a change would have been quite welcome for me personally, but it never took place. There was one little problem: even today it remains sufficiently difficult to establish the criteria for granting degrees even in a single specialty. But if they began to confer degrees on generalists, who would be capable of presenting them? Who would be able to accredit the accreditors? And it's partially for this reason that McLuhan's suggestion was never accepted.

This development has been a bit infelicitous from my point of view Even though I have taught for the Translation Studies Program at New York University, and even though I

have translated for everyone from the Royal Shakespeare Company in England to the United Nations and the World Press Review in New York, and even though thanks to the generosity of editors I've been able to publish a number of articles about this subject, I have never found the support for my work that could have truly assisted me. And for this reason as well, your invitation to come to Xalapa has also been quite welcome.

But enough of my concerns. The field of translation history, as you will see, is so rich and exciting that one cannot view it otherwise than as the true history of the world, both the spiritual and the scientific evolution of the entire human race. And it is a study that perhaps cannot be carried out except by generalists, because it is par excellence the study and the history of Everything.

The following text presents the main points of a somewhat more free-form presentation based on notes and interspersed with slides. Where no pictorial content is specified for a slide, this means that the slide in question redisplays a citation provided in the text, so that the audience can consider its meaning at their leisure instead of merely hearing it on the run. The point of this is to suggest a solution for a problem that greatly concerned the famous linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: "It somehow worries us that the thought in a sentence is not wholly present at any one moment. We regard it as an object which we are making and have never got all there, for no sooner does one part appear than another vanishes." (Note 1)

Professors, Translators, Ladies and Gentlemen-

This is the seventh time in a bit more than a decade that I have tried to explain the history of translation, and I hope I'm getting better at it, because I'm well aware of how vast a field this is. My first attempt began around 1993 when I started to design what I hoped could become a museum exhibition about translating and interpreting, entitled *Translation and Translators-The Binding Force of World Civilization,* though such an exhibit has so far not become a reality. It included forty-five individual displays and would have covered some 4,400 square feet. Many of these displays would have been historical in character, and as one of them I visualized a constantly changing animated slide show projecting many famous citations about translation, which became my second project in this area.

This I believe some of you had a chance to see in Mexico City at the first Jornadas Ieromianas conference in 2000. I next took all these citations and added a great deal more material to assemble a seminar on translation history which I presented four years in a row between 1997 and 2000 as part of the NYU Translation Studies Program. That seminar was called *A Practical View Of Translation History* and was scheduled for three hours but sometimes went on for as long as four. And amidst these tasks I also wrote two

articles about aspects of this subject for the *ATA Chronicle,* and I believe you have received copies of those articles to take home with you, along with another sheet I used during the NYU seminar, entitled *Recurrent Ideas about Translation Over the Last 2,500 Years.* My sixth foray into this theme was my paper dealing with the prehistory of translation, *Hermes, God of Translators and Interpreters,* presented at the NYU2000 translation conference and thanks to your kindness also at the first Jornadas conference the same year. So as I've already said, we definitely are dealing with a vast subject, and what I'm going to present today is really only a brief, somewhat subjective overview.

(All the documents mentioned in the preceding two paragraphs can be found on this website by clicking here*.)*

Before I jump in, let me show you one citation that sums up everything else I'll be saying today and ought to fill us all with at least a certain sense of pride: *[SLIDE]*

> From Translation all science had its offspring.- Giordano Bruno (quoted by John Florio, 1603) *(Note 2)*

In a way that says it all. John Florio was a contemporary of William Shakespeare and compiled the first Italian-English dictionary, including all the words for fornication in both languages. His translation of Bocaccio's Decameron into Elizabethan English is available on-line.

I've called today's paper Some Major Dates and Events in the History of Translation, and I want to follow the order of these dates and events as described in the abstract, at least for the first eight or nine examples. But thereafter I may be skipping around a bit, perhaps jumping back and forth in history, because I'm eager to tell you about as many of these dates and events as possible, so that you can see what they have in common from century to century. And I'm even more eager for you to see how often history has repeated itself, how the same observations about translation have repeated themselves in quite a few eras and cultures over time.

And that's the point of the *Recurrent Ideas about Translation* sheet, let's look at it for a moment. I don't want to go into much detail about it, we'll see some of that detail as we move along, so what I'd like to happen instead is for you to take my word for it right now, the claim I'm making is that there have only been some eight recurrent ideas about translation expressed over and over again over the centuries. And they're all right here on this sheet. And it's really a rather simple claim.

Which brings me to my next slide. *[SLIDE]*

Medicine

Mathematics

Engineering

Computers

Knowledge of Translation

2000 B.C.   **1997**
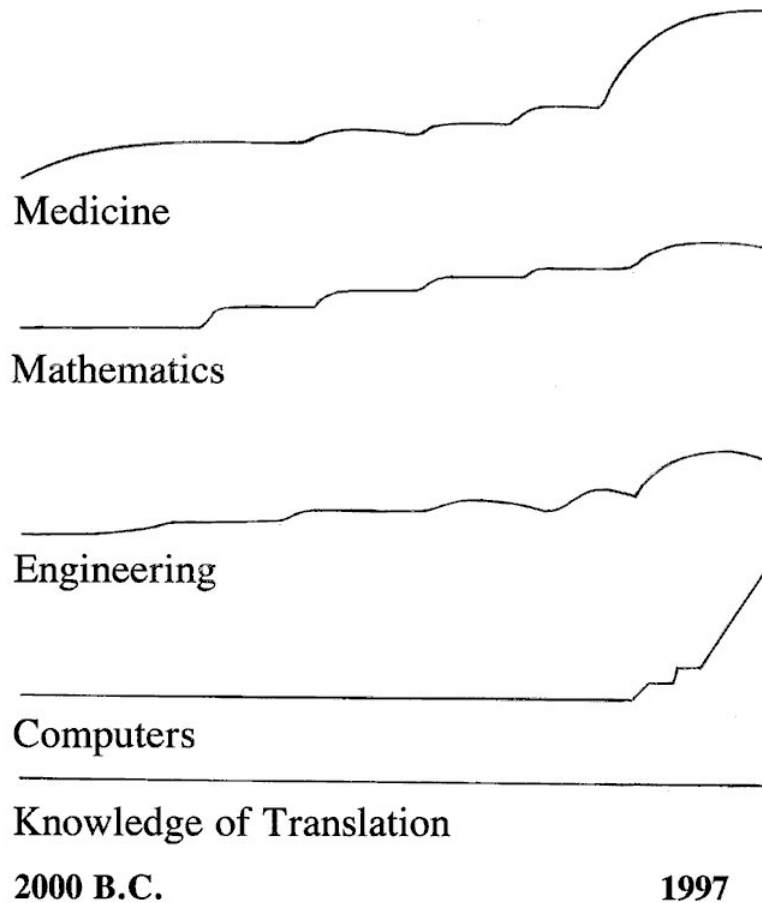
What you see on this slide is a set of curves showing the great advances made in most of the other recognized sciences since ancient times. Here you see represented Medicine, Mathematics, Engineering, Computers, etc., there are lots of other sciences I could have shown as well, and I think you'll readily agree with me that the advances made in all these fields have been positively spectacular.

But here at the bottom you see an extremely flat "curve," in fact almost a perfect straight line, with perhaps just a small blip at the end to signify all the work that has just recently been done in what we call "translation studies" over not much more than the past two decades. I hope you'll agree with me that the progress in understanding and in simply developing knowledge about translation has been comparatively small over this same period of time.

Here's the question I'm going to be asking and examining: precisely why should this be so? Why wouldn't knowledge about how and why translation works have developed at much the same rate? What's more, I believe there's a fairly good chance that I will even be able to offer you something like an answer to this question.

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So let's start with the first three examples: translating from Sumerian into Hebrew, from Sacred Egyptian into Classical Greek, and from Aramaic into Arabic. They all have something in common, especially the first and the third examples.

Somewhere along the line we've all been taught, Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike, the story of Adam and Eve. And that Eve was created from Adam's rib, de la costilla de Adán, es verdad?

But could this just be the world's first untranslatable pun? *[SLIDE]* Here we are dealing with the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh, which is now recognized as the source for many of the stories in the Old Testament:

> In Genesis, Eve springs from Adam's "rib." But this is a pun in the original Sumerian version, where the word ti means both "rib" and "life-giving."
>
> When the Sumerian Adam was ill, he was given a goddess meaning both "Rib-Lady" and "Life-Giving Lady." Only the meaning "rib" was translatable into Hebrew.

And the date for that is sometime around 1400 B.C. The source, if anyone wants to know, is positively impeccable: Kramer's *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character.* *(Note 3)* So in other words, here's the very first anecdote about translation we can lay our hands on, and what's it about? It's about an error, which fits into Recurrent Idea # 2 or # 3 on that sheet. And it's all too typical of many observations about translation through the ages–forget about all the times we translators get it right, the only times we're noticed is when we make an error.

Let me skip now to the third example mentioned in my abstract, translating Aramaic into Arabic. Muslims are taught by the Koran that martyrs for Islam will all go to paradise, where they will be given 72 black-eyed virgins. And since 9/11 just about everyone else in the world has heard this story as well. A very brave German translator and scholar, who goes by the pseudonym of Christoph Luxenberg, has recently disputed this version. Literary Arabic begins with the Koran, and it now appears that some of the contents of the Koran came from Jewish sources written in Aramaic.

In the Aramaic version, it states that martyrs for God will be given 72 *hur*, a very suggestive word if you know German, where it is the exact cognate of the English noun whore. But it didn't mean anything like either whore or even virgin in Aramaic–it meant nothing more or less than *uva, grain de raisin,* grape. Which could lead to a fairly anticlimactic ending–the Islamic martyr has succeeded in blowing up thousands of

people, including himself, he makes his way to Paradise, and all he gets for his efforts is a bunch of grapes. *(Note 4)*

In the world of Islam, which has not yet had its Reformation or even its Counter-Reformation, this information is needless to say dynamite. And that is why this particular translator needs to work under a pseudonym. As we'll soon be seeing, translation can be a fairly dangerous business.

And now let me jump back to the second example in the abstract, which makes one further point about our profession we know all too well: it can sometimes be very hard to get a translation right. *[SLIDE]*

> Terms when translated do not always preserve the same meaning; and every nation has certain idioms impossible to express intelligently to others. You may possibly translate them, but they no longer preserve the same force.

> - Iamblichus of Chalcis, ca. 330 A.D.   *(Note 5)*

Iamblichus of Chalcis was a late neoplatonic philosopher in the school of Plotinus and Porphyry. He lived in what is now Syria and was clearly influenced by oriental doctrines in his best-known work, On the Egyptian Mysteries, from which this excerpt is taken. And here we find one of the first statements about how difficult the translation of technical terms can be. He was almost certainly working with ancient Egyptian religious texts now lost to us and attempting to convey their meaning to a more rational Hellenic world. Something similar is frequently true whenever we try to translate difficult terminology from one language to another.

Another even earlier witness to this problem was none other than the famous Roman orator Cicero during the year 45 B.C.: *[SLIDE]*

> But the Stoics, as you are aware, affect an exceedingly subtle or rather crabbed style of argument; and if the Greeks find it so, still more must we, who have actually to create a vocabulary and to invent new terms to convey new ideas. *(Note 6)*

And while we're at it, let's not forget the namesake for our conference: *[SLIDE]*

> Since my youth, it is not words, but ideas,
> which I have translated.

> - Saint Jerome, ca. 404 *(Note 7)*

And that of course belongs to Recurrent Idea # 1 on my sheet, liberalism vs. literalism in translation. That argument also crops up repeatedly. But I'd like to hold off on that for now.

Because now we get to the exciting, truly melodramatic part of translating, almost the Indiana Jones side of our vocation. Translators who have actually been punished by death for practicing our profession: one execution, one forced suicide, two burnings at the stake, one fatal stabbing by religious extremists. And certainly many more besides, since I'm about to explain to you why it is altogether likely that throughout history many other interpreters and translators may have paid the supreme penalty for following our line of work.

Here's our first instance, from The Life of Themistocles by Plutarch: *[SLIDE]*

> Themistocles, by the consent of the people, seized upon the interpreter, and put him to death, for presuming to publish the barbarian orders and decrees in the Greek language; this is one of the actions Themistocles is commended for..."
> (Note 8)

This is not the best translation of this passage, simply the most dramatic one, possibly because it's by the English poet and playwright John Dryden.

Why do I suppose, as I do, that quite a few translators have met this kind of fate over the centuries? Because when you're dealing with an army on the march or a military camp, it's altogether likely that soldiers could grow impatient with anyone who speaks the language of the enemy, even if it's their own interpreters. We know that vast numbers of Americans up in Estados Unidos del Norte are so stupid that they actually believe movie star celebrities are just like the roles they play on the screen in their real lives, even the villains. In much the same way, if you're going to fight a battle against a foreign enemy tomorrow and you suddenly hear someone in your own camp speaking the language of that enemy, even if he's your official interpreter just practicing or showing off with a few friends, your patience might suddenly wear thin. Especially if you've had a few drinks, which for some reason tend to become available right before a battle.

Since 9/11 we've also seen a number of cases where US interpreters have been charged with cooperating with Islamic extremists, though in at least two of those cases the charges had to be withdrawn for lack of evidence. You don't even have to speak the enemy's language, all you need is to be perceived, rightly or wrongly, of being dressed like the enemy. Just two years ago someone went crazy in Brooklyn, New York, and killed Chinese and East Indian Americans on the assumption that they must be middle-eastern terrorists. And if you're following the news from Iraq, you may have noticed how

often interpreters are still being victimized over there, either killed or kidnapped by Iraqis or arrested as potential spies by US troops.

The next two cases of executing translators are probably the most famous, so I'll just sum them up briefly because one of my handouts is almost entirely about them. Take a look at the *Ten Years that Changed the Perception of the Translator* sheet when you can. As usual the reason why they were executed was a combination of religion and politics. The first case is the famous French translator and translation theorist Etienne Dolet. His judges decided that he had to die because he had actually added in his translation a few words which-horror of horrors-couldn't be found in the original. The Englishman was the Bible translator William Tyndale, who made the mistake of trying to translate the Bible when King Henry VIII of England had decided there could be only one correct translation. Dolet was tortured and burned at the stake in Paris, Tyndale strangled and burned in Antwerp. And as I point out in the handout, during this same period one other translator also had a price on his head, Martin Luther, who dared to translate the Bible into German. In just the same way we can assume that Christoph Luxenberg has a price on his head for daring to claim there are no black-eyed virgins in Paradise. This was certainly demonstrated just a few years ago by the untimely assassination of Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses. Not too many people in the West have followed up on Igarashi, so I wanted at least to show you what he looked like. *[SLIDE: portrait of Hitoshi Igarashi]*

And of course there was also the case of Walter Benjamin, the first translator of Proust into German. As many of you know, he was a formidable writer and critic in his own right and was slated for death by the nazis for three different reasons: he was a Jew, he was a communist, and he was gay. He died just inside Spain in 1940, at the Port Bou

railway station, where he became so certain the Gestapo were waiting to arrest him that he went into a toilet stall and killed himself. Here's a photo of Benjamin at his peak. *[SLIDE: portrait of Walter Benjamin]*
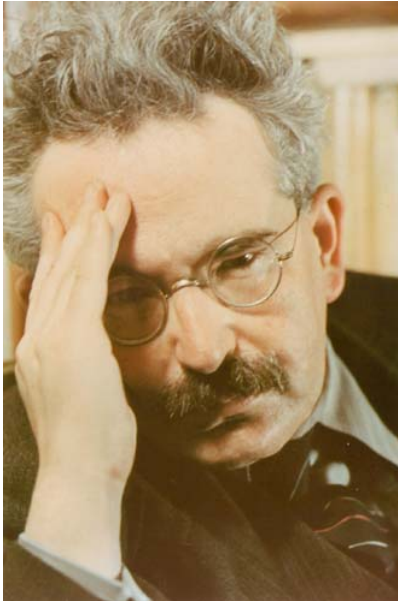
There's a question I want to ask about all this: precisely what is it that makes translation at least potentially a dangerous profession? What is it about translating that awakens such intense feelings, almost on a religious level, occasionally even inspiring murder? I may have something like an answer before this session is over, but here are two observations which I believe may point us part of the way towards that answer. The first is by the famous *traductologo* George Steiner, author of After Babel: *[SLIDE]*

> The perennial question whether translation is, in fact, possible is rooted in ancient religious and psychological doubts on whether there ought to be any passage from one tongue to another.

> - George Steiner, 1975 *(Note 9)*

As you can see, Steiner believes this question delves deeply into the human soul, reaching a level where many people in many countries consider their own language as almost sacred, so that any attempt to refashion its utterances in another language comes close to sacrilege.

Steiner's position is very much shared by the Japanese linguist Takao Suzuki, who means the following statement as a criticism of his own people: *[SLIDE]*

There is here in our country a general feeling that it is not natural for foreigners to understand Japanese.

- Takao Suzuki, 1975 *(Note 10)*

So there it is again, that sense that we're really not supposed to be able to speak someone else's language, that it's actually abnormal if someone is able to handle such an achievement, that such a person is not fully to be trusted and perhaps deserves to be punished. In other words, the possibility of language in these cases is being used for nearly the exact opposite of communication, for all practical purposes as a means of preventing communication. I think most of you in this room can see what I'm driving at, and I'll try to spell this point out more clearly as part of my conclusion.

What we next see may seem at first sight one of the worst translations ever made. It is a translation into French by a very great French author, François Marie de Arouet, better known as Voltaire, of an extremely well known English passage, on the same level as Calderón de la Barca's Qué es la vida, un frenesí...que toda la vida es sueño, etc. Let's take a look at it and see what some of the problems may be. And once we've seen what these problems are, I'm going to do something rather surprising, I'm actually going to defend this translation and explain why it really had to turn out like this. *[SLIDE]*

"To be, or not to be? that is the question!
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles...

"Demeure, il faut choisir et passer à l'instant
De la vie, à la mort, ou de l'être au néant.
Dieux cruels, s'il en est, éclairez mon courage.
Faut-il vieillir courbé sous la main qui m'outrage... *(Note 11)*

The obvious difference are of course that Shakespeare's English is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter-the famous

dih-dah dih-dah dih-dah, dih-dah, dih-DAH,

while the French text is not only one foot longer in iambic hexameter but also in rhymed alexandrine couplet form:

dih-dah dih-dah dih-dah, dih-dah, dih-dah dih-pont,
dih-dah dih-dah dih-dah, dih-dah, dih-dah dih-fond,

the so-called masculine ending or masculine couplet, but that this couplet must be followed by a feminine couplet, containing one extra unstressed syllable at the end:

dih-dah dih-dah dih-dah, dih-dah, dih-dah dih-semble,
dih-dah dih-dah dih-dah, dih-dah, dih-dah dih-tremble.

At one point I actually tried to retranslate Voltaire's translation back into English, partly to see if it could be done, partly to see what it might look like. This is a bit like retranslating machine translation output back into its language of origin. Or perhaps even more similar to ten children sitting around in a circle, each one whispering a single word to the next child, until when the circle is completed a totally different word or perhaps utter nonsense emerges. In any case, this is what I came up as a retranslation of Voltaire's version:"

Yet stay, we must now choose as in the moment caught,
From life to death we pass, from being into naught,
Cruel gods, if such there be, pray guide me past my daring,
Must aging's hand bear down and crush me all despairing...

Now there's a point I want to make here, and it's this: how on earth could Voltaire have come up with such a translation? First of all, he was considered the greatest French playwright of his age, and secondly, unlike many Frenchmen of his time, he actually knew English extremely well. He had already been sentenced to the Bastille once for his opinions, and in order to avoid being imprisoned a second time he escaped to England, where he not only mastered the language but became friends with Swift, Congreve, Pope, and some other well-known authors of that period. He possessed genuine theatre skills, and he knew English well. So how could he possibly have arrived at this translation?

The answer is that he had no choice. He was dealing with what I call a "Public Presentation Language." For almost three centuries in France, from the poetry of Ronsard through the plays of Corneille and Molière and on through the entire eighteenth century, even spilling over into the first three decades of the nineteenth century, this rhythm became the official form for poetry and the theatre. Even in their correspondence those professing culture would sometimes spontaneously break into this meter in order to make a point, as though they believed that writing in this form made their thoughts more official and credible. Voltaire truly admired Shakespeare's play, as mentioned he was the greatest French playwright of his time, but he knew perfectly well that there was no way that a more literal translation could succeed in Paris.

Only in the year 1830 did it come about that a French playwright finally presented a play that broke with this form. The reaction was immediate-rioting broke out in the theatre, everyone in the audience claimed they hated the play, including all the actors in it. They simply could not stop telling each other and the author how bad it was, every newspaper denounced it, even the playwright's mistress who played the female lead insisted that it was a dismal mess. That play, which certainly qualified as "romantic" but seems so tame and colorless to us today, was Hernani, and it went on to inspire an opera by Verdi. The author was of course Victor Hugo. *(Note 12)*

But that is only one example of a "Public Presentation Language." Another is to be found in the four-character summations or maxims or proverbs, which until quite recently were the medium for Chinese philosophy, literature, and even Chinese medicine. Even today these four-character units are used in political slogans. Why? Because they sound right, because that's how they are expected to sound, because that's how most official and correct knowledge is supposed to sound. Here are two examples from Chinese medicine: *[SLIDE]*

大肠热结

dà cháng rè jiē
Detention of Heat in Large Intestine

肝火上炎

gān huǒ shàng yán
Flaming of the Liver Fire

(Note 13)

I don't want to go into great detail on this theme, since our time is limited, but there is one question I'd like to ask. Is it possible that we ourselves today, at the beginning of that modern, liberated era the twenty-first century could also be subject to the limitations of a "Public Presentation Language?" I believe in fact that we are, but that we cannot totally visualize the full extent of this limitation because we dwell within it, just as three centuries of Frenchmen could not look beyond alexandrine couplets and countless centuries of Chinese culture transpired comfortably enough within the limits of four-character maxims. Just as fish, or so the analogy goes, cannot adequately visualize the medium of water that they live in.

When we finally break through towards something closer to reality and are better able to recognize the dimensions of our own self-imposed limiting medium, I believe we will discover it is rooted in the requirements we take for granted in how information is presented to us, whether as journalism, radio and TV continuity, the shape of stage plays and musicals, film premises and scripting devices, the format of major public meetings and festivals, perhaps even the structure of scholarly papers. Certainly much of what is called "linguistics" today is written in a Public Presentation Language. When I was in Berlin during the 'Sixties, there was even an academic term for this, *Informationsesthetik*, the esthetics of information, *la estética de la información,* though I've searched in vain since then to discover whether other scholars are still talking about it. In other words, this could turn out to define our own Public Presentation Language, the barrier we need to break through to achieve a realization of what may be a greater reality surrounding us.

I'd like to make it clear that I certainly do not mean that Chinese four-character phrases are likely to go the way of alexandrine couplets, if anything they are far more supple and expressive and central to the structure of Chinese. It is frequently possible using only four Chinese characters to express entities and concepts that require far more syllables in most Western languages. For instance, drawing at random from a bilingual dictionary, the terms "gross registered tonnage," "corpus cavernosum and spongiosum," and "preliminary tremor," requiring from six to eleven syllables in English, can all be expressed by a mere four Chinese monosyllabic characters. Granted, some of these expressions may appear somewhat opaque to Chinese readers, but because of the semi-pictorial nature of Chinese they may still convey somewhat more meaning to uninformed Chinese readers than their mainly phonetic English equivalents do in our culture.

What does this have to do with translation? A great deal as it turns out. As long as we are dealing with a Public Presentation Language in a single language or culture, it becomes extremely difficult to translate out of it into other languages or into it from the outside. Which is why Voltaire found it impossible to translate Hamlet in any other way, and why we find it almost impossible to translate Chinese medical terms into Western languages. Or to communicate adequately about pressing social, economic, or cultural needs.

Let me add that this Public Presentation Language also made it difficult to translate foreign books into Chinese. An excerpt from my museum proposal: two of the most famous Chinese translators were Yanfu and Linshu. In such a process, an interpreter would read aloud his version of an original, and a scholar would turn this into good Chinese literary style. According to one authority, the results were often remote from the original meaning. These translators worked tirelessly, and on their choice of works the Chinese public depended for its first idea of Western literature. Linshu did not read any foreign language: he depended on interpreters, but he published 171 translations. And that's the end of my section about Public Presentation Languages.

Now I'd like to talk about two very large personalities in the history of translation, one an Iberian and the other a native of China. They both traveled considerably for their times and they both sought to reach out towards other cultures, though in quite different ways. I call the first one an Iberian because if I claimed him for Spain then Catalans would object. But if I called him a Catalan, that would not be quite right either, since he was technically a Mallorquín, or as we say rather clumsily in English, a Majorcan. The accounts of his wild youth were famous, and at least according to one of the folk tales those days went on for some time until he finally accosted a beautiful Mallorquín lady, whom he had long unsuccessfully pursued, on the steps of the cathedral at Palma. She turned and bared her bosom to him and at least according to the tale said something like "Look now at the beauty you so desire." Her breasts were half eaten away by cancer.


We are of course talking about Raimon Llull, *[SLIDE: portrait of Llull]* who lived during the Thirteenth Century and would much later be elevated by the Vatican as the Blessed Raimon Llull. And this may be the source for the pious tale I am relating. In that tale (and also in reality) he soon retreated to a monastery on the top of a nearby mountain, where over time he meditated so deeply that he encountered repeated visions of Christ. If I seem a bit personally attached to this story, it's because quite inadvertently and never having heard of Raimon Llull I too was drawn to this monastery, where I stayed for a month in a visitor's hostel, all of this during my own wild youth as part of a story worthy of mariachi lyrics involving the nearby island of Ibiza, a beautiful woman, a jealous husband, and a vindictive police chief.

But precisely what did Raimon Llull do that is worthy of our attention at this conference? He did so much that it is hard to know where to start, so I'll only provide a brief sketch, which may be enough for most of you since you are part of the mundo Iberoamericano and probably know far more about him than most northern Americans or northern Europeans. Raimon Llull has a good claim to having invented the novel, he wrote passionate love poetry, he founded a school for the study of oriental languages, and he

led a campaign within the Catholic Church for closer contacts with the Islamic world, though mainly for the purpose of converting Muslims. He at first wrote in Latin and Mallorquín/Catalan but soon learned Arabic as well and began to write works about the differences between Christendom and Islam and translated them into Arabic himself. And if that were not enough in itself, he is also regarded in the computer world as the inventor of the first relational data base. Here it is, the so-called Divine Engine, a set of independently moving concentric wheels containing the various names and attributes of god.
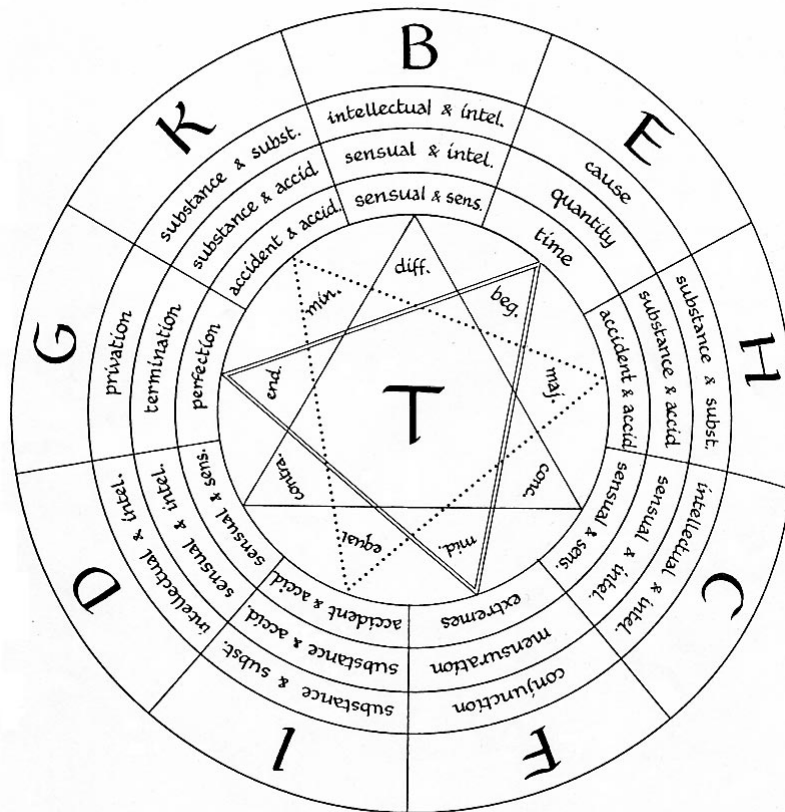
[SLIDE] He made several trips to Muslim lands and at least according to another folk story may have been put to death on his last such journey for preaching against the religion of the prophet.

Probably the most famous translator in the world was a Seventh Century Chinese monk named Xuanzang, who traveled to India in search of Buddhist scriptures and came back some years later amid a train of pack animals bearing them on their backs. *[SLIDES]*

The pilgrim's return: another version of Hsüan-tsang journeying from India laden with Buddhist scrolls. The whisk in his left hand is to wipe away evil desires. (21)

I say he is the most famous translator in the world simply because there is probably no one in China who has not heard of him, and we have no translator in Western nations who is regarded with such awe. A great part of his fame came about from a Ming-dynasty novel loosely based on his exploits, *xiyouji*, or *Journey to the West,* also known as *Monkey* or *The Monkey King.* A few years ago this novel was in turn converted into a 25-part Chinese TV serial aired by PBS, showing Xuanzang with his travelling companions

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continually encountering dangerous monsters to subdue and voluptuous female demons to propitiate. The historical Xuanzang spent 17 years in India, another four years in his travels, and on his return set up a school for translating the Buddhist scrolls he had collected. With his assistants he translated Indian holy books measuring 84 times the length of the Bible.

Another important development in translation took place in late Eighteenth Century Germany, when Gotthold Ephraim Lessing essentially invented the profession of "dramaturg," soon to followed by his colleagues Johann Ludwig Tieck and the Brothers Schlegel. I've frequently worked as a dramaturg myself, so I can explain that dramaturgs are people who take a play from another culture and make it work for a theatre audience within their own culture. Essentially their task involves taking translation one stage further, perhaps the people at Microsoft would describe it as "localizing" a stage play. In other words, if a joke doesn't work or a dramatic situation doesn't convey in the new language, the dramaturg has to find an equivalent joke or a slightly altered stage situation that will make it work in that language, but without doing violence to the basic meaning and structure of the play. The dramaturg also acts to defend the meaning of the play by sitting onstage during early rehearsals and explaining to the actors and even on occasions the director why some changes might violate that meaning.

I'd like to speed up now a bit if I can and say not much more about the remarkable translation academy at Jundishapur in Persia from the Eighth to the Tenth Centuries than I did in my proposal for a museum exhibition. It served as a precursor to the center of learning at Baghdad under Haroun al Raschid a century later. In Jundishapur Nestorian Christians speaking Greek, Jews who spoke Hebrew and Syriac, and Indian scholars working in Sanskrit all merged together in an environment where translators worked eagerly to translate their wisdom into Arabic. These translators worked in teams, supervised by an expert and assisted by copyists. In this way were not only Greek medical and scentific works translated into Arabic, but their work also reflected the influence of other oriental traditions.

I'll say even less about the so-called great school at Toledo, since I'm sure that in this part of the world you've heard all about it and also because some dispute has arisen as to whether it was so much a school as a convergence of scholars in search of manuscripts. For instance, the UNESCO book on this subject, which I found less than convincing in my review, claims that Gerard of Cremona wandered from Italy to Toledo in 1157 simply because he wanted to find a copy of Ptolemy's *Almagest* for himself. If there are any scholars present who are better informed about this matter, I'll be happy to hear their views and learn from them.

Now, coming closer to my conclusion, I'd like to discuss what I believe is the most important question arising from all this translation history. Precisely where are we today?

Where are we not only as individuals, but where are we as translators? Where is translation located, both in today's practical world and in the scholarly realm? Some of the answers are fairly obvious. Translation is flourishing as never before, at least in quantitative and economic terms. As of the early 'Nineties some 450 million pages were being translated each year in the US, Europe, and Japan alone. Today the totals are surely even higher. More and more peoples around the world require translations of an ever growing number of texts. The computer age has only speeded up this tendency.

Some of my other answers to this question may be somewhat more controversial. Those of you who have been to my website know that I am something of an extremist about translating. I define translation as every act of explaining anything to anyone, even in one's own language. In other words, I see translation as the prototype of the universal act of communication. We are all of us constantly helping others to move from a less precise and less technical level of understanding to a more advanced one. In a sense we are all of us continually translating. This is true today, and except in times of total social breakdown it has always been true. The process of translation is not only built into our social and economic values, it is built into the generational structure of the human race, in which those of us who are older are constantly called upon to supplement the understanding of those who are younger, even though the younger may then use that understanding to move to a further level, forcing us to catch up with them.

Given the sheer centrality of communication and my perhaps extremist views of translation in our society, you might expect that the scholarly world, at least that part of the scholarly world that deals with language and linguistics, would hold our work in high esteem. But except for conferences like this one, where translators come together, this is not at all the case.

Instead–and here I may indeed be going too far on my own hobby-horse–we find occupying the very pinnacle of the academic world what I have called in my abstract some truly curious beliefs about linguistics and machine translation. And these two sets of beliefs are clearly related. Let me start with linguistics, where as the very last paragraph of his book *The Language Instinct*, his final summing-up, Steven Pinker has this to say:

> Knowing about the ubiquity of complex language across individuals and cultures and the single mental design underlying them all, no speech seems foreign to me, even when I cannot understand a word. The banter among Guinean highlanders in the film of their first contact with the rest of the world, the motions of a sign language interpreter, the prattle of little girls in a Tokyo playground-I imagine seeing through the rhythms to the structures underneath, and sense that we all have the same minds. *(Note 14)*

I cannot help expressing the deepest possible skepticism about almost every section of this paragraph. I have spoken enough foreign languages well enough and lived long enough in foreign nations to know that we do not "all have the same minds" and that there is no "single mental design" underlying all our languages, though there are certainly elements of similarity. If any part of this paragraph were true, translation-a process which Pinker mentions nowhere in his various books-would present no problems at all or at most minimal ones, and there would be no need for this conference.

It is as though the claim had been made that we all live in the same kinds of rooms, but this is demonstrably not true throughout the world, and even if it were true we would still all have different kinds of furniture inside those rooms. Or perhaps that all our houses are built on the same architectural principles, but this too is untrue, since architectural styles also differ throughout the world and some houses lack foundations but are supported by poles driven into the water and may not even have walls. And even if, as is perhaps likely, we were to find that this claim springs from the notion that all computers are alike, this is still not true, since all computers can be run on different software and/or operating systems. And however our minds may turn out to run, it is likely that our various languages supply their software and operating systems.

Yes, we have similar minds, but certainly not the same ones, or we would not continually feel the need to explain almost every object, idea, and process we encounter to each other. And there cannot possibly be a "single mental design" underlying all our languages, since if this were true we would not need to learn almost everything about both our own and foreign languages rather painfully by a process of trial and error, which I know has been the case for me and, as we can readily observe, tends to also be the case for others.

As for machine translation, I want to say very little here since I have written so often about it, I'd merely like to refer you to an excellent report published in the summer issue of the online Translation Journal, a review which in its printed and electronic versions has been in existence since 1987. _(Note 15)_ According to this exhaustive analysis, machine translation currently counts for little more than one percent of all those 450 millions of translated pages I mentioned before. The report cites market analysts as predicting no change in its market share earlier than 2007. The authors moreover conclude that the main usefulness of MT will simply end up as yet another computer tool for those translators willing to use it.

And in fact the main reason we keep seeing the same arguments favoring MT being repeated in print can be traced to these very "market analysts," individuals with no knowledge of translation or language worth mentioning who nonetheless cannot control

the fire ignited in their brains by their vision of machines conquering our multi-billion dollar market. And that is why the same claims keep being repeated over and over again and why funding keeps flowing to those who repeat them.

I think I'd better try and reach some sort of conclusion now before I go entirely too far. Earlier I suggested that there are two questions that need answering at this point. First, why has there been so very little progress over the centuries in understanding the nature of translation when there has manifestly been so much progress in such fields as medicine, mathematics, or engineering? And why has the recognition of the translator's almost unending contributions to history for so long veered between extended periods of studied boredom and brief outbreaks of murderous passion?

I believe the reason lies in the almost total and overwhelming role played by translation and translators in our society, at least in the broader definition I have suggested. In a very real sense, almost every act of communication we perform is to some degree also an act of translation. As I have made it abundantly clear by means of a replicable form of testing in another of my papers, there is ultimately no earthshaking difference between what we translators do with two languages and what everyone else has to do every day even within a single language. *(Note 16)* As translators both in the broad and narrow sense, we are as Bruno observed, the makers and developers of science, of knowledge, of society itself.

What we do is simply so overwhelmingly all-embracing and ubiquitous that most laypersons and even most academic linguists simply cannot conceive of its totality. That is why we so frequently find so many stories in our newspapers boiling down to a single misperception or disagreement about the use of language or a single so-called error in translation. And also why we find self-proclaimed purists or fundamentalists outraged by a single violation of their perceived doctrines about language and truth, even to the point of attacking and murdering translators they believe are responsible.

I am no longer quite so alone in making these points as I was ten years ago, and I am pleased to note that Scott L. Montgomery seems to be headed in a similar direction in his book published in 2000, *Science in Translation: Movements of Knowledge Through Cultures and Time.* And several decades earlier the French savant Georges Mounin pointed out that there can be no valid theory of linguistics that does not also provide a workable theory of translation, something the MIT school quite clearly fails to do. Mounin is worth listening to, since long ago he wrote both a history of linguistics and a history of translation, a feat duplicated by no one else in the field.

This sheer and utter ignorance, not just about translation but about the complexity of both language and reality, cannot last forever and will not do so. Just as the bubble of

Voltaire's Public Presentation Language burst in almost an instant at the right time, so will the shared misperceptions of our own age fall away when the time is ripe, including the misperceptions of the MIT School of Linguistics. Fortunately there is a linguist of both past and coming days whose challenging insights will supplant them.

This is the Dane Louis Hjelmslev, whose theory of Glossematics both resembles and confirms what Giordano Bruno said at Oxford in 1603. *(Note 17)* Linguistics, he maintained, contrary to common belief, is not the science of language at all. Rather, language and linguistics, including translation, together are the primary science. And all the other so-called sciences are merely the offshoots, the branching paths, the sequels and results of language. Which is essentially what Bruno also said in almost the same way: "From Translation all science had its offspring." And all knowledge as well, indeed much of human experience and practical intelligence.

Notes

1. Zettel, paragraph 153.

2. Bruno. Yates, 89. Pellegrini, 193. Original text appears to be Florio's English.

3. Kramer, 149.

4. As one might expect, Christoph Luxenberg's work has been all over the press and the web lately. Full title provided in bibliography. For a scholarly overview, consult: http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol6No1/HV6N1PRPhenixHorn.html

5. Iamblichus, 129. Translated by Alexander Wilder.

6. Cicero, 219. Translated by H. Rackham.

7. St. Jerome, 61.

8. Plutarch, VI 2.

9. Steiner, 239.

10. Suzuki. Miller, 83. Translated by Miller as edited by John Bukacek.

11. Voltaire: Letters on England, Project Gutenberg etext.
12. The Memoirs of Victor Hugo, Project Gutenberg etext, search for "Hernani."

13. Sung, pp. 238, 216.

14. Pinker, p. 430.

15. Machine Translation and Computer-Assisted Translation: a New Way of Translating? found at: http://www.accurapid.com/journal/29computers.htm

16. Gross, 2003.

17. Whitfield, in Hill, pp.283-91. The works of Louis Hjelmslev, like many other texts in linguistics, are not entirely transparent for non-specialists. I owe at least part of my own understanding to a brief essay by Hjelmslev's translator Francis J. Whitfield, which appeared in a hard-to-find volume entitled quite simply Linguistics and published in 1969 by the Voice of America Forum Lectures. Another source, available in both Spanish and Swedish, is Malmberg, pp. 154-74.

The Spanish text of the introduction follows, with thanks to Leticia Molinero, editor of Apuntes, *for suggesting many improvements.*

Profesoras y Profesores, Traductoras y Traductores, Señoras y Señores:

Ya que voy a presentar la mayor parte de esta ponencia in inglés, querría decir algunas palabras en español como introducción. En primer lugar, me siento muy agradecido y muy honrado de que me hayan ofrecido esta ocasión de hablar sobre la historia de la traducción. Hace cinco decenios en Madrid, cuando trabajaba para Radio Nacional de España como locutor bilingüe de la programación norteamericana, en aquella época, sí que habría podido decir que quizás hablaba un poco castellano. Hoy día, verdaderamente no puedo jactarme más de una pericia semejante, y es por eso que mi presentación será en un idioma con el que me siento más seguro.

Querría también empezar disculpándome un poquito de mi acento y de estos ceceos quizás un poquito cómicos-¿qué puedo decir?- ya es el español que aprendí, y ya es un poquito tarde para cambiarlo. Querría disculparme por otra cosa, puede ser que durante los días siguientes a veces hablara una palabra pensando que fuera española, que en realidad sea una palabra italiana. He pasado unos años en España y en Italia, y para nosotros los dos idiomas son tan parecidos que a veces se confunden. Si esto ocurriera tan sólo una vez, les ruego sepan perdonar el error.

En el área de estudios académicos que he investigado se encuentran varias materias, tales como–claro–la traducción, su práctica y su teoría, pero también algo de la lingüística, los ordenadores, la inteligencia artificial, y de la machine translation, la llamada traducción automática. Además siempre he tratado de integrar en mis investigaciones las culturas del oriente y del occidente, incluso la medicina moderna y la tradicional de la China y de otros países. Como ya sepan tal vez aquellos de ustedes que hayan leído o sea oído mi trabajo sobre "Hermes, el dios de la Traducción", siempre he buscado situar tanto la traducción como la lingüística en un campo unido como un solo estudio.

El camino que he seguido en estos esfuerzos no ha sido nunca fácil. Ha sido el camino del estudioso y del investigador independiente. Es casi un camino prohibido en el mundo académico moderno, donde todos los estudios y todos los estudiantes adelantados han de ser especializados. Durante los años sesenta había un famoso sociólogo canadiense, Marshall McLuhan, que criticaba severamente este mundo académico e insistía en que la universidad debería fomentar y producir no solamente especialistas sino también generalistas. Este tipo de cambio habría sido muy bienvenido por mí personalmente, pero este paso nunca tuvo lugar. Había un pequeño problema: también hoy día es bastante difícil establecer la base para las credenciales en una sola especialidad. Pero si se empezara a conferir diplomas generalistas, ¿quién sería capaz de darlos? ¿Quién daría las credenciales a los que den las credenciales? Y es parcialmente por esta razón que la sugestión de McLuhan no ha sido aceptada.

Este desarrollo ha sido un poquito infeliz para mi. Aunque haya enseñado en the Translations Studies Program of New York University, y aunque gracias a la generosidad de editores haya podido publicar varios artículos sobre nuestro tema, nunca he encontrado el apoyo de mi trabajo que hubiera podido ayudarme verdaderamente. Y por esta razón también su invitación a Xalapa ha sido muy bienvenida.

Pero ya basta de mis problemas. El campo de la historia de la traducción, como van a ver, es tan rico y tan fascinante que no se deja ver otramente que como la verdadera historia del mundo, la evolución del espíritu y de la ciencia de la entera raza humana. Y es un estudio que quizás puedan abordar solamente los generalistas, porque es par excellence el estudio y la historia de Todo.

Documents Distributed at the Conference

You can find on this website all the documents that were mentioned at the beginning of this paper and made available at the Conference, as follows:

To see the table of exhibits and a site map for the projected museum exhibit *Translators and Interpreters: The Binding Force of World Civilization,* click <u>here</u>.

To download your own free copy of the computer program *Truth About Translation,* click <u>here</u>.

To see the text of the paper *Hermes–God of Translators and Interpreters: The Origins of Language and the Prehistory of Interpreting,* click <u>here</u>.

To read the article *The History of Translation History*, a review of the UNESCO book presenting one aspect of this subject, click <u>here</u>.

To read the article Ten Years that Changed the Perception of the Translator, click <u>here</u>.

To see the outline from the NYU Seminar on Translation History entitled *Recurrent Ideas About Translation Over The Last 2,500 Years*, simply look below.

Recurrent Ideas About Translation
Over The Last 2,500 Years

1. The never-ending battle between "translating words" vs."translating ideas," AKA "Literalism" vs. "Liberalism."

    1A. Translating ideas is better than translating words.

    1B. Translating words is better than translating ideas.

2. Translation is virtually or ultimately impossible because no two languages are alike.

        2A.   Only   fools,   scoundrels,   or   traitors   translate.
        2B.   Translation   violates   natural   or   divine   law.
        2C. Translation can never work because Language A (your language) is inferior to Language B (my language).
        2D. No humans can possibly do it, so let's have humans invent a machine that can do it

3. Perhaps translation is possible, but most translations are bad, and most translators are just as bad (or at best poorly trained).

3A. To improve matters, all translators must be carefully trained and strict rules must be followed. The training method and rules are usually provided by the person or persons making this statement.

4. Academics--including even translation scholars--have no real knowledge of practical translation problems. This position is held even by a number of academics and translation scholars.

5. Whatever problems may exist, translation is nonetheless of great value to society.

6. There must be some great and majestic theory of universal knowledge or universal grammar to account for all the aforementioned problems and contradictions.

6A. There can be no such theory.

7. The art and craft of translation are greatly misunderstood, and translators are largely ignored.

8. It is nonetheless possible to provide general advice and specific tips to help translators improve their translations.

8A. Most such advice and/or tips is (are) contradictory or mutually exclusive.

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