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***The True Interpreter, A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979.**

PREFACE

It would be churlish to forget my apprenticeship in *linguistique différentielle* under M. Jean Darbelnet at l'université Laval, Québec, and to pass over in silence my debt to the *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* by himself and Jean-Paul Vinay. Dr. George Steiner, by his incisive comments from a less pragmatic viewpoint than mine, and Sir Basil Blackwell, by his interest and shrewd advice, caused major changes in the thrust of the book. Among my colleagues at Ottawa, I received much help from Mr. Thomas Henderson of Linguistics, Dr. Bernhard Maurach of Modern Languages, Mrs. Susan Treggiari of Classics and Dr. Michael MacConaill of Medicine. At Cambridge, Christopher Ryan of St. Edmund's House helped me with the Italian material, and the Department of Linguistics provided several occasions for airing parts of the book. Dr. Gregor Maurach of Pretoria gave valued assistance with the work of German translators from classical languages. Several generations of students at both Ottawa and Cambridge have seen the work grow, and their reactions have suggested interpretations that would otherwise have escaped me.

Most of the research was done in the university libraries of Ottawa, Cambridge and Harvard, with visits to St. Paul's University (Ottawa), Queen's (Kingston) and the Eastman School of Medicine (Rochester, New York). Important material came from the British Museum and the National Libraries of Canada and France. Mme. Conchita Belmonte-Proulx and Mme. Clémence Tondreau of the Ottawa Department of Linguistics typed the final manuscript with their usual cheerful efficiency and inspired interpretation of corrections and scribblings. And my wife Joy, by her understanding and encouragement in the face of what was, at times, an almost hopeless task, took a major hand in reducing the mountain of files to something readable.

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Acknowledgements

Collect for the Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

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Introduction

Western Europe owes its civilization to translators. From the Roman Empire to the Common Market, international commerce and administration has been made possible by translation; the first Christian translators were the four Evangelists who recorded in Greek what Christ and his disciples had said in Aramaic; and it is only since the early nineteenth century that scientists have ceded to professional translators the responsibility of turning essential books into the language of their fellow-countrymen. Yet in spite of this, writers from Republican Rome to the present have consistently treated translation as merely a branch of literature. It is little wonder then that a comprehensive theory of translation has proved elusive. For through neglect of non-literary work, significant though and practice have been suppressed and forgotten.

But first, what is translation?

In its simplest terms, it is 'the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language' (Jakobson 1966, 233). The key word here is 'interpretation', as Jakobson comments:

> If we were to translate into English the traditional formula, *traduttore traditore*, as 'the translator is a betrayer', we would deprive the Italian rhyming epigram of all its paronomastic value. Hence a cognitive attitude would compel us to change this aphorism into a more explicit statement, and to answer the questions: translator of what messages? betrayer of what values?

Obviously, translators have answered the first question by pointing to the genre and subject of their source text. As all texts are message-bearing, any discussion of theory rests on the second question; for the user of language seeks from an utterance not only what it contains, but also why it was said. Rarely are these issues explicitly formulated in translation; they depend on relationship instinctively placed between content, reader and expression.

A complete theory of translation, then, has three components: specification of function and goal; description and analysis of operations; and critical comment on relationship between goal and operations. Few writers have presented a universally applicable theory of translation. Indeed, the only example that comes readily to mind is George Campbell (1719-96), principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, whose 500-page introduction to his 1789 translation of the Gospels discusses a practical theory of semantic and grammatical equivalence within the frame of both literary and spiritual goals of scriptural translation.

Most of those mentioned in this book treat one facet of theory to the exclusion of others. For the majority, translation is a literary craft; from the prologues of the dramatist, Terence (190?-159 B.C.), to Jiri Levý, the most common focus of attention has been the creative aspect of translation. A curious legacy of this is the almost universal custom in libraries of classifying books on translations with manuals of literary criticism. Reciprocal influences between form and content, ramifications of source and target texts in their respective literary traditions, the rights and duties of the translator, all are constant themes since Cicero's discussions in *De finibus* and *De optimo genere oratorum*. Except for a continual fascination with the rights and wrongs of literal and free translation, this stream of theory has analysed aims and results without paying much attention to the linguistic operations involved.

In contrast, linguists and grammarians have identified theory with analysis of semantic and grammatical operations. The major tradition of this type, lasting form St. Augustine (354-430) to the twentieth-century European structuralists, sees meaning in terms of the dualistic Aristotelian model of the sign. During the twentieth century, this was challenged from two quarters. American structural linguists, denying that a linguistic sign 'contained' meaning in the Aristotelian sense, saw the translator's task as creating a language structure which would evoke the same reaction in a target-language reader as the original had in its readers. On the same assumption, the London School of J. R. Firth sought linguistic equivalence through creating an utterance that would fit into the same social context ('context of situation') as the original. In each case, translation is regarded as an application of linguistics: the aim of creating a text of equivalent meaning is assumed, and the object of theory is to describe and validate lexical and grammatical manipulations meant to attain that meaning.

The third approach, hermeneutics, treats language and its signs as creative energy. Though the concept of the Word (ëüãïò) Is Platonic in origin, and came into Jewish and Christian theology through Philo Iudaeus (*fl.* 20 B.C.), it enters translation theory through Johann Gottlieb Herder (1744-1803) and the German Romantics. The Romantics began reversing the priorities of traditional sign theory; where traditionally the word had existed solely as an index to a concept, in the thought of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) it shaped concepts and cultures. Romanticism was an ideology which, by identifying language and nation, was later to fuel the nationalist movements of Europe for the next century and a half. For in their eyes, history of language went hand in hand with history of nation, because the vigour of its language forged the identity of a nation and every aspect of its culture. What the Romantics sought through translation was to

transfer the creative power of great writers of other languages into their own. Thus translation was not primarily production of a text, but interpretation and contemplation of Language at work. Friedrich Hölderlin (1780-1843), seeing individual languages as realizations of 'Pure Language', made of translation a search for the kernels of meaning which composed this basic tongue. Under the impetus of this tradition, German linguistic philosophers of the early twentieth century dismissed the Saussurean concept of language as inadequate and untrue to its generative power. Thus when Martin Heidegger (1889-) speaks of language as 'the House of Being', he is redefining the Romantic tradition in terms reminiscent of Roman Catholic sacramental theology, in which signs are not merely indicators, but also *signa efficientia*.

Each one of these theories of translation falls short: for the literary and epistemological directions of the first and third groups leave aside technique; and the linguistic theories assume a very generalized purpose for translation. Furthermore, in their present forms, they all have an unrealistically restricted view of their own section of theory. In the case of the literary theorist, not all uses of language are literature; and so there is a large body of translation resting on uncreative language functions and purely objective transfers of information. Likewise, in the form which has most influenced translation, hermeneutic theory biasses its object by assuming that all uses of language are essentially creative, that all language signs are primarily *signa efficientia*. This is patently absurd: as daily life demands from language everything from automatic routines to the sublimest of utterances, inspiration of the type taken for granted by Heidegger and Meschonnic is rarely called on. Thus the literary theorist is not concerned with the ordinary uses of language; and the hermeneutic theorist has misinterpreted the nature and function of the linguistic sign.

Nor can the linguist escape unscathed. He too has misinterpreted the nature of the linguistic sign by seeing its auditory component purely in relation to the concept, rather than having significant value in its own right. His vision of sign-function is likewise narrow: in concentrating on lexicon and grammar, he has, until recently, neglected the wider question of discourse. In addition, it is only since the appearance of sociolinguistics as a separate discipline, that the social implications of Saussure's dichotomy between *signification* and *valeur* have brought home to linguists that the subjective and objective information carried out by the linguistic sign is not as consistent as is usually made out.

In the polemic between these three groups of theorists, only a few individuals have perceived that their approaches are complementary. Fortunately, good translation has never depended on adequate theory.

A translator moulds his image of translation by the function he assigns to language; from function, one extrapolates to nature. Thus those who translate merely for objective information, have defined translation differently from those for whom the source text has a life of its own. Hence, our account of how theory and practice have evolved begins with a summary of European thought on the nature and function of language as it has affected translation. The models and definitions of chapter 2, then, depend on purposes and functions of language as they are revealed in actual translations. It is significant that practice has usually come before theory, so that the first attempt at definition occurs in Quintilian (A.D. 90) (see page 44, below), though intuitive models of translation had already been reflected in practice for some 300 years. In chapter 3, the different genres of translation are related to Karl Bühler's three functions of language: objective information, self-expression and persuasion.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are concerned with the second component of theory, specification of operations. Translation involves a double interpretation. Its first element, usually instinctive, assesses the balance of communicative function; then interpretation focusses on 'content' and the way it is coloured by function. The lexical and grammatical operations following this act of interpretation are described according to the Geneva School's *stylistique comparée*, on of the most comprehensive modern linguistic approaches to translation practice.

In order to relate principles and technique, chapters 7 and 8 focus on texts themselves, rather than on the ideologies and techniques so far exemplified; and chapter 9 discusses the evolution of translation theory from Roman times until the present. Thereby, achievements of translators are measured against theory and purpose as they have differed between genres and periods. The snippets of translation were largely chosen at random with little regard to quality. Unintelligent application of principle is often as revealing as subtle mastery: the pretentious insensitivity of Desfontaines is as illustrative of the eighteenth century as Tarteron's delightful Horace. In an effort to cast the net as far as possible and to maintain a difficult balance between the various fields of translation, interesting texts, even if obscure, have been included when they best illustrate points at issue. Where possible, translations have been checked against recensions of the original extant during the translator's lifetime; for modern critical texts often differ significantly. Where the original does not appear in the text with its translation, it will be found in the Appendix, referenced to other translations quoted. Passages in classical languages have been translated into English; in the case of illustrative passages, this

translation is merely a crib, whose function is glossing the words rather than elucidating the content.

If in its own time and for its own purposes, every competent translation is judged adequate, it is clear that, given differences between periods and genres, adequacy in translation is a concept at the mercy of intellectual fashion and pragmatic need. It is therefore the intention of this book to criticize, rather than to evaluate. For evaluation would necessarily entail measuring the past against the standards of the present: in so measuring one's predecessors, one is tempted to read difference as deficiencies. And it is this act of evaluation, which mistaken for dispassionate evaluation, is the instrument of the evolution we are about to trace.

Source : *The True Interpreter, A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1979.