

INTRODUCTION

In 1978, in a brief Appendix to the collected papers of the 1976 Louvain Colloquium on Literature and Translation, André Lefevere proposed that the name *Translation Studies* should be adopted for the discipline that concerns itself with ‘the problems raised by the production and description of translations’.¹ The present book is an attempt to outline the scope of that discipline, to give some indication of the kind of work that has been done so far and to suggest directions in which further research is needed. Most importantly, it is an attempt to demonstrate that Translation Studies is indeed a discipline in its own right: not merely a minor branch of comparative literary study, nor yet a specific area of linguistics, but a vastly complex field with many far-reaching ramifications.

The relatively recent acceptance of the term Translation Studies may perhaps surprise those who had always assumed that such a discipline existed already in view of the widespread use of the term ‘translation’, particularly in the process of foreign language learning. But in fact the systematic study of translation is still in swaddling bands. Precisely because translation is perceived as an intrinsic part of the foreign language teaching process, it has rarely been studied for its own sake. What is generally understood as translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text² into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that (1) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and (2) the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted. The instructor can then hope to measure the students’ linguistic competence, by means of the TL product. But there the matter stops.

The stress throughout is on understanding the syntax of the language being studied and on using translation as a means of demonstrating that understanding.

It is hardly surprising that such a restricted concept of translation goes hand in hand with the low status accorded to the translator and to distinctions usually being made between the writer and the translator to the detriment of the latter. Hilaire Belloc summed up the problem of status in his Taylorian lecture *On Translation* as long ago as 1931, and his words are still perfectly applicable today:

The art of translation is a subsidiary art and derivative. On this account it has never been granted the dignity of original work, and has suffered too much in the general judgement of letters. This natural underestimation of its value has had the bad practical effect of lowering the standard demanded, and in some periods has almost destroyed the art altogether. The corresponding misunderstanding of its character has added to its degradation: neither its importance nor its difficulty has been grasped.³

Translation has been perceived as a secondary activity, as a 'mechanical' rather than a 'creative' process, within the competence of anyone with a basic grounding in a language other than their own; in short, as a low status occupation. Discussion of translation products has all too often tended to be on a low level too; studies purporting to discuss translation 'scientifically' are often little more than idiosyncratic value judgements of randomly selected translations of the work of major writers such as Homer, Rilke, Baudelaire or Shakespeare. What is analysed in such studies is the *product* only, the end result of the translation process and not the process itself.

The powerful Anglo-Saxon anti-theoretical tradition has proved especially unfortunate with regard to Translation Studies, for it has merged so aptly with the legacy of the 'servant-translator' that arose in the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century there had been a number of studies on the theory and practice of translation in various European languages, and 1791 had seen the publication of the first theoretical essay on translation in English, Alexander Tytler's *Essay on the Principles of*

Translation (see pp. 63–4). But although in the early nineteenth century translation was still regarded as a serious and useful method for helping a writer explore and shape his own native style, much as it had been for centuries, there was also a shift in the status of the translator, with an increasing number of ‘amateur’ translators (amongst whom many British diplomats) whose object in translating had more to do with circulating the contents of a given work than with exploring the formal properties of the text. Changing concepts of nationalism and national languages marked out intercultural barriers with increasing sharpness, and the translator came gradually to be seen not as a creative artist but as an element in a master—servant relationship with the SL text.⁴ Hence Dante Gabriel Rossetti could declare in 1861 that the work of the translator involved self-denial and repression of his own creative impulses, suggesting that

often would he avail himself of any special grace of his own idiom and epoch, if only his will belonged to him; often would some cadence serve him but for his author’s structure—some structure but for his author’s cadence...⁵

At the opposite extreme Edward Fitzgerald, writing about Persian poetry in 1851, could state ‘It is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who, (as I think) are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them.’⁶

These two positions, the one establishing a hierarchical relationship in which the SL author acts as a feudal overlord exacting fealty from the translator, the other establishing a hierarchical relationship in which the translator is absolved from all responsibility to the inferior culture of the SL text are both quite consistent with the growth of colonial imperialism in the nineteenth century. From these positions derives the ambiguity with which translations have come to be regarded in the twentieth century. For if translation is perceived as a servile occupation, it is unlikely to be dignified by analysis of the techniques utilized by the servant, and if translation is seen as the pragmatic activity of an individual with a mission to ‘upgrade’ the SL text, an analysis of the translation process would cut right across the established hierarchical system.

Further evidence of the conflicting attitudes towards translation in the English-speaking world can be drawn from the way in which educational systems have come to rely increasingly on the use of translated texts in teaching, without ever attempting to study the processes of translation. Hence a growing number of British or North American students read Greek and Latin authors in translation or study major nineteenth-century prose works or twentieth-century theatre texts whilst treating the translated text as if it were originally written in their own language. This is indeed the greatest irony of the whole translation debate: that those very scholars who reject the need to investigate translation scientifically because of its traditional low status in the academic world do at the same time teach a substantial number of translated texts to monolingual students.

The nineteenth-century legacy has also meant that translation study in English has devoted much time to the problem of finding a term to describe translation itself. Some scholars, such as Theodore Savory,⁷ define translation as an ‘art’; others, such as Eric Jacobsen,⁸ define it as a ‘craft’; whilst others, perhaps more sensibly, borrow from the German and describe it as a ‘science’.⁹ Horst Frenz¹⁰ even goes so far as to opt for ‘art’ but with qualifications, claiming that ‘translation is neither a creative art nor an imitative art, but stands somewhere between the two.’ This emphasis on terminological debate in English points again to the problematic of English Translation Studies, in which a value system underlies the choice of term. ‘Craft’ would imply a slightly lower status than ‘art’ and carry with it suggestions of amateurishness, while ‘science’ could hint at a mechanistic approach and detract from the notion that translation is a creative process. At all events, the pursuit of such a debate is purposeless and can only draw attention away from the central problem of finding a terminology that can be utilized in the systematic study of translation. So far, in English, only one attempt has been made to tackle the terminological issue, with the publication in 1976 of Anton Popovič’s *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation*.¹¹ a work that sets out, albeit in skeletal form, the basis of a methodology for studying translation.

Since the early 1960s significant changes have taken place in the field of Translation Studies, with the growing acceptance of the study of linguistics and stylistics within literary criticism that has led to developments in critical methodology and also with the rediscovery of the work of the Russian Formalist Circle. The most important advances in Translation Studies in the twentieth century derive from the ground-work done by groups in Russia in the 1920s and subsequently by the Prague Linguistic Circle and its disciples. Vološinov's work on Marxism and philosophy, Mukařovský's on the semiotics of art, Jakobson, Prochazka and Levý on translation (see Section 3) have all established new criteria for the founding of a theory of translation and have showed that, far from being a dilettante pursuit accessible to anyone with a minimal knowledge of another language, translation is, as Randolph Quirk puts it, 'one of the most difficult tasks that a writer can take upon himself.'¹² That translation involves far more than a working acquaintance with two languages is aptly summed up by Levý, when he declares that

A translation is not a monistic composition, but an interpenetration and conglomerate of two structures. On the one hand there are the semantic content and the formal contour of the original, on the other hand the entire system of aesthetic features bound up with the language of the translation.¹³

The stress on linguistics and the early experiments with machine translation in the 1950s led to the rapid development of Translation Studies in Eastern Europe, but the discipline was slower to emerge in the English-speaking world. J.C.Catford's short study in 1965 tackled the problem of linguistic untranslatability (see pp. 32–7) and suggested that

In *translation*, there is substitution of TL meanings for SL meanings: not transference of TL meanings into the SL In *transference* there is an implantation of SL meanings into the TL text. These two processes must be clearly differentiated in any theory of translation.¹⁴

He thus opened a new stage of the debate on translation in English. But although his theory is important for the linguist, it is nevertheless restricted in that it implies a narrow theory of meaning. Discussion of the key concepts of equivalence and cultural untranslatability (see Section 1) has moved on a long way since his book first appeared.

Since 1965, great progress has been made in Translation Studies. The work of scholars in the Netherlands, Israel, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and the United States seems to indicate the emergence of clearly defined schools of Translation Studies, which place their emphasis on different aspects of the whole vast field. Moreover, translation specialists have benefited a great deal from work in marginally related areas. The work of Italian and Soviet semioticians, developments in grammatology and narratology, advances in the study of bilingualism and multilingualism and child language-learning can all be utilized within Translation Studies.

Translation Studies, therefore, is exploring new ground, bridging as it does the gap between the vast area of stylistics, literary history, linguistics, semiotics and aesthetics. But at the same time it must not be forgotten that this is a discipline firmly rooted in practical application. When André Lefevere tried to define the goal of Translation Studies he suggested that its purpose was to ‘produce a comprehensive theory which can also be used as a guideline for the production of translations’,¹⁵ and whilst some may question the specificity of this statement, his clear intention to link theory with practice is indisputable. The need for systematic study of translation arises directly from the problems encountered during the actual translation process and it is as essential for those working in the field to bring their practical experience to theoretical discussion, as it is for increased theoretical perceptiveness to be put to use in the translation of texts. To divorce the theory from the practice, to set the scholar against the practitioner as has happened in other disciplines, would be tragic indeed.

Although Translation Studies covers such a wide field, it can be roughly divided into four general areas of interest, each with a degree of overlap. Two are *product-oriented*, in that the emphasis is

on the functional aspects of the TL text in relation to the SL text, and two of them are *process-oriented*, in that the emphasis is on analysing what actually takes place during translation.

The first category involves the *History of Translation* and is a component part of literary history. The type of work involved in this area includes investigation of the theories of translation at different times, the critical response to translations, the practical processes of commissioning and publishing translations, the role and function of translations in a given period, the methodological development of translation and, by far the most common type of study, analysis of the work of individual translators.

The second category, *Translation in the TL culture*, extends the work on single texts or authors and includes work on the influence of a text, author or genre, on the absorption of the norms of the translated text into the TL system and on the principles of selection operating within that system.

The third category *Translation and Linguistics* includes studies which place their emphasis on the comparative arrangement of linguistic elements between the SL and the TL text with regard to phonemic, morphemic, lexical, syntagmatic and syntactic levels. Into this category come studies of the problems of linguistic equivalence, of language-bound meaning, of linguistic untranslatability, of machine translation, etc. and also studies of the translation problems of non-literary texts.

The fourth category, loosely called *Translation and Poetics*, includes the whole area of literary translation, in theory and practice. Studies may be general or genre-specific, including investigation of the particular problems of translating poetry, theatre texts or libretti and the affiliated problem of translation for the cinema, whether dubbing or sub-titling. Under this category also come studies of the poetics of individual translators and comparisons between them, studies of the problems of formulating a poetics, and studies of the interrelationship between SL and TL texts and author—translator—reader. Above all in this section come studies attempting to formulate a theory of literary translation.

It would be fair to say that work in categories 1 and 3 is more widespread than work in categories 2 and 4, although there is little

systematic study of translation history and some of the work on translation and linguistics is rather isolated from the mainstream of translation study. It is important for the student of translation to be mindful of the four general categories, even while investigating one specific area of interest, in order to avoid fragmentation.

There is, of course, one final great stumbling block waiting for the person with an interest in Translation Studies: the question of *evaluation*. For if a translator perceives his or her role as partly that of ‘improving’ either the SL text or existing translations, and that is indeed often the reason why we undertake translations, an implicit value judgement underlies this position. All too often, in discussing their work, translators avoid analysis of their own methods and concentrate on exposing the frailties of other translators. Critics, on the other hand, frequently evaluate a translation from one or other of two limited standpoints: from the narrow view of the closeness of the translation to the SL text (an evaluation that can only be made if the critic has access to both languages) or from the treatment of the TL text as a work in their own language. And whilst this latter position clearly has some validity—it is, after all, important that a play should be playable and a poem should be readable—the arrogant way in which critics will define a translation as good or bad from a purely monolingual position again indicates the peculiar position occupied by translation *vis-à-vis* another type of *metatext* (a work derived from, or containing another existing text), literary criticism itself.

In his famous reply to Matthew Arnold’s attack on his translation of Homer, Francis Newman declared that

Scholars are the tribunal of Erudition, but of Taste the educated but unlearned public is the only rightful judge; and to it I wish to appeal. Even scholars collectively have no right, and much less have single scholars, to pronounce a final sentence on questions of taste in their court.¹⁶

Newman is making a distinction here between evaluation based on purely academic criteria and evaluation based on other elements, and in so doing he is making the point that assessment is *culture bound*. It is pointless, therefore, to argue for a definitive translation, since

translation is intimately tied up with the context in which it is made. In his useful book *Translating Poetry, Seven Strategies and a Blueprint*,¹⁷ André Lefevere compares translations of Catullus' Poem 64 with a view not to comparative evaluation but in order to show the difficulties and at times advantages of a particular method. For there is no universal canon according to which texts may be assessed. There are whole sets of canons that shift and change and each text is involved in a continuing dialectical relationship with those sets. There can no more be the ultimate translation than there can be the ultimate poem or the ultimate novel, and any assessment of a translation can only be made by taking into account both the process of creating it and its function in a given context.

As will be illustrated later in this book, the criteria for the translation process and the function of the TL text have varied enormously through the ages. The nineteenth-century English concern with reproducing 'period flavour' by the use of archaisms in translated texts, often caused the TL text to be more inaccessible to the reader than the SL text itself. In contrast, the seventeenth-century French propensity to gallicize the Greeks even down to details of furniture and clothing was a tendency that German translators reacted to with violent opposition. Chapman's energetic Renaissance Homer is far removed from Pope's controlled, masterly eighteenth-century version. Yet to compare the two with a view to evaluating them in a hierarchical structure would serve no purpose.

The problem of evaluation in translation is intimately connected with the previously discussed problem of the low status of translation, which enables critics to make pronouncements about translated texts from a position of assumed superiority. The growth of Translation Studies as a discipline, however, should go some way towards raising the level of discussion about translations, and if there are criteria to be established for the evaluation of a translation, those criteria will be established from within the discipline and not from without.

In the present book, the problem of evaluation is not developed at any length, partly due to reasons of space but mainly because the purpose of this book is to set out the basics of the discipline rather than to offer a personal theory. The book is organized in three

sections, in an attempt to present as many aspects of the field of Translation Studies as possible. Section 1 is concerned with the central issues of translation, with the problem of *meaning*, *untranslatability* and *equivalence*, and with the question of translation as a part of communication theory. Section 2 traces lines through different time periods, to show how concepts of translation have differed through the ages and yet have been bound by common links. Section 3 examines the specific problems of translating poetry, prose and drama. The emphasis throughout is on *literary translation*, although some of the issues discussed in Section 1 are applicable to all aspects of translation and interpreting.

I am well aware that among the many aspects of translation not developed here, the problem of translation between non-related languages is clearly one of the most crucial. This aspect of translation is considered briefly in Section 1, but since to my great regret I am only able to work in Indo-European languages, I thought it best not to venture into areas outside my competence, except where points of general theoretical principle are concerned that might be applicable to all languages.

Underlying this discussion of translation is the belief that there are general principles of the process of translation that can be determined and categorized, and, ultimately, utilized in the cycle of text—theory—text regardless of the languages involved.