

# Theorizing About Translation and Translation Studies

Mukesh Williams

## Abstract

*The act of translation between languages and cultures has been going on for centuries, but the act of theorizing about translation is of recent origin. In the last forty years translation scholars have attempted to understand the process of translation and evaluate its merits giving rise to a whole range of conceptualizing which is now called translation studies. Translation studies, therefore, has grown within important scholastic enclosures of the west attempting to conduct political and institutional interventions to maintain their force and transmute the text and its context. In an attempt to transform the minor area of translation studies into a major scientific discipline, scholars in linguistics, cultural studies and other associated areas have taken methods from structuralism and linguistics to theorize about the act of translation and its related activities. The growth of English language as a global lingua franca, the process of globalization and the proliferation of the Internet have all expanded the boundaries of translation studies and made it into a lucrative trade. Today translation studies is not only a new academic*

*discipline but is vigorously promoted by private and governmental organizations to gain political and economic advantage. Post-structuralism has exposed some of the smug assumptions of translation studies and its hegemonic intentions whenever it happens. It has been argued that there can be no perfect translation as translation always exists within the translatable and the untranslatable. A text possesses the 'metaphysics of presence' and therefore cannot be reduced to a formula, ideology or method. Nonetheless the future of translation studies seems bright as universities compete with each other to open translation studies programs to cater to the needs of both aspiring translators and the translation industry.*

Translating a text or theorizing about it is one of the most effective forms of political and institutional interventions that not only transform the text but also its context (Derrida, 1986 160). It is one of the many attempts by which political and social institutions maintain their "force" by the logic of their political and social practices (Eagleton, 1983 148). Since translation is pervaded by ethical, political and judicial considerations, it cannot be reduced to a formula, ideology or methodology. The text always exists as a "field of forces" which is often "heterogeneous, differential, open, and so on" (Derrida, 1986 167-8). But it is precisely this reductivism that justifies the logic of translation and its aspiration to become a scientific discipline. The text possesses a 'metaphysics of presence' to use a Heideggerian phrase and cannot be truly separated from its "mode of feeling" or emotional thrust. As we explore the history of signification and the metaphysics of presence we begin to understand the variety of influences, "the field of forces," that shape the translated text within the powerful institutions of western societies.

There are different trajectories of control and power that determine the

translatability, production and dissemination of a text in the target language which is invariably the dominant language. The logic of discrimination and domination does not work only in the realm of economic and political institutions but also in the “homelands of academic culture (Derrida, 1968 170). As we define boundaries between individual texts and institutional contexts, we realize that these boundaries cannot be fixed without taking recourse to political and economic controls or subversions and maintain a strong force of justificatory logic. The politics of translation is often connected to globalizing ambition and goes beyond the logic of theory and honest critical inquiry. Therefore when we analyze the theory or theorizing of translation we must be cautious that such discourses are not just conceptual and semantic exercises but also intersect and affect the boundaries of our existence. We might wish to concur with Derrida when he asserts that there is nothing “beyond the text” (Derrida, 1986 167-8).

### **Defining Translation and Theorizing About It**

Over the years scholars have taken pains to define translation itself as an art, craft or science. Some say translation is neither creative nor imitative but stands between the two (Popovic, 1976). Jacques Derrida believes that translation exists between the fine boundary of the translated and the un-translated. A good translation must be able to transcend languages and cultures (Venuti, 2004 18). Walter Benjamin believes that translation should be seen as a “mode” and must encourage the reader to return to the original.

To comprehend it as a mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the laws governing the translation: its translatability (Benjamin, 2004 76).

In the English speaking world translation studies is usually referred to by the

word translatology while in French it is *la traductologie*. Though the term *la traductologie* was coined by the Canadian Brian Harris it has not found its way in English dictionaries or spell checkers. There is no clear agreement amongst the French experts on translation studies about *traductologie* as well. Andrew Chesterman campaigns for a pragmatic Popperian traductologie, while Michel Ballard wants it to be a “science d’ observation.” Teresa Momaszkievicz wants *traductologie* to move from its monological protocols of a given translator to dialogical analysis between collaborating translators. The discipline of translation studies as it has evolved in the Anglophonic world is more pretentious and less exact while in the Francophonic domain it still remains more down-to-earth and inchoate.

Over thirty years ago, lamenting over the lack of a theoretical framework amongst the practitioners of translation, the Slovak theoretician Anton Popovic (1933-1984) suggested that translation studies should be closely connected to the semiotics of communication and must remain an open interdisciplinary practice (Popovic, 1976 xxvii). In his essay “Aspects of Metatext” he further argued that it is possible to measure the textual distance a meta text (translated model) has traveled from the proto text (target to be translated) by studying the variation that occurs in the meta text (Popovic, 1976 227). Though Popovic’s statement begs the question it nonetheless is an important component of a translated text.

Modern apprehensions of academic survival has given rise to a high degree of creativity in manufacturing sub-disciplines such as cultural studies, postcolonial studies and translation studies and giving them respectability by calling them hybrid disciplines and organizing master’s and doctoral programs around them. A few decades ago many of these sub or pseudo-disciplines were a part of Comparative Literature departments which in turn were either a part of or

breakaway rebel of English departments. Today the strict disciplinary boundaries of yesteryears are no longer standing as researchers in human and natural sciences are more concerned with social issues and survival and less with academic scholarship and integrity. Academic assignments are pursued more to further a career and less as a vocation.

According to Popovic translation involves a high degree of creativity both linguistic and cultural. He argues that though a translator's art is "secondary" he has to "mix analytical thinking with creative abilities; create according to fixed rules, and introduce the prototext into a new context" (Popovic, 1976 38). Popovic defines source text as prototext and target text as metatext. Most translators employ their creativity to "choose within choices already made" (Popovic, 1976 39).

All translations are secondary models, basic derivatives. All translations enter a linguistic and philosophical domain where they "clash between primary and secondary communication" (Papovic, 1976 47).

This constitutes both the dynamics and dialectics of translation in modern times. However according to Professor Peter Liba (2006) Popovic himself did little translation and had no experience in literary translation.

Scholars have argued about what constitutes a good translation and often agree that linguistic merit and readability are the most important attributes of a good translation. Peter Newmark enumerates eight different techniques of translations, namely: word-for-word, literal, faithful, semantic, adaptation, free, idiomatic and communicative. After evaluating all the eight methods of translation Newmark concludes that the semantic and communicative methods of translation are

closest to the twin goals of translation that is a commendable translation; a good translation must have exactness and economy (Newmark, 1988 45).

### **Some Basic Concerns of Translation and Translation Studies**

As is clear from the preceding discussion, some of the basic concerns of translation and translation studies have to do with laying down the set of rules by which it can be evaluated. Translation from one language (source language) into another (target language) has largely been a religious activity ideally suited for textual dissemination aiding in global proselytization. Therefore, translation studies do not only emphasize the nitty-gritty of translation but lay down normative and prescriptive standards to evaluating it. In the initial years of its development translation studies played a marginal role within literary studies.

During the 1920s translation studies was placed in the domain of applied linguistics. But with the rise of Saussurean structural methods of analysis translation studies gained impetus. Structuralism gave a theoretical framework to translation studies and a theoretical support to standardize its methods. Thus began the attempt to develop a translation theory which would give respectability to translation studies as an academic discipline (Gentzler, 2001 1-2).

Though structuralism declined in the 1970s under the influence of post-structuralist methodologies of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Judith Butler and Julia Kristiva, Russian linguists such as Roman Jakobson carried the normative standard of structuralism further. They employed the methods of linguistic anthropology and ethnography of communication to theorize about translation. Jakobson developed intra-lingual (paraphrase), inter-lingual (commonsense translation) and inter-semiotic (verbal signs encoded in non-verbal signs) aspects of communication and translation to give credence to

translation studies (Jakobson, 2000 113-18).

Structuralism provided the theoretical base for linguists and formalists to build a model of translation. Structuralism believed that cultures could be analyzed through linguistic structures (structural linguistics) which were quite different from the structures found in social organizations or ideas. Structuralists felt that linguistic structures constituted a 'third order' of analyzing and understanding cultures (Deleuze, 2004 170-192). However the attempt to eliminate "extrinsic or mixed" variables in the study of languages, as Noam Chomsky or Labov did, was an attempt to lay down arbitrary standards to understand linguistic paradigms. Deleuze and Guattari stated with some conviction of the heterogeneity of the linguistic register in the following sentence,

*You will never find a homogeneous system that is not still or already affected by a regulated, continuous, immanent process of variation (why does Chomsky pretend not to understand this?)"(Deleuze and Guattari, 2000 103).*

In an attempt to standardize translation studies, scholars attempted to create a "homogenous system" untouched by "variations."

Translation studies therefore always desired to become a respectable discipline through the creation of translation theory which would be overarching and complete. Edwin Gentzler explained,

The ultimate goal of translation studies was to develop a full and all-encompassing translation theory one which is 'above' and can look down upon existing partial theories which Holmes felt were often specific in

scope and dealt with only one or a few aspects of the larger concern (Gentzler, 2001 94).

The attempt to find an “all-encompassing translation theory” preoccupied many translation studies scholars of the early 1970s, such as the Polysystem Group. The Group comprised of two Israeli scholars, Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury who concentrated on linguistic equivalence and power relations between languages. They concentrated more on reader-response theory and reception analysis than on the actual process of translation itself (Even-Zohar 1990; Toury 1995; Gentzler, 2001 viii, 1-2).

With the rise of continental postmodern ideas in the 1970s there was a ferment of methodologies in the Anglo-American world. Standard literary theory and linguistic analysis were hedged out by post-structuralism, deconstruction, gender theory, media studies and new historicism. In an atmosphere of intense theorizing within departments of English, linguistics and cultural history a more practical approach towards translation studies emerged. Abstract theoreticians began to understand the actual process of translation and departments became more vocationally-directed offering diplomas and degrees in translation studies together with degrees in applied linguistics and translation. But in the early 1980s translation studies began to emerge as an academic discipline attempting to establish an identity of its own. Toury argued that at this time application was not an integral part of translation studies, thereby underscoring the need to theorize more than translate.

In the late 1980s James Holmes divided translation studies into theory and application, the first dealing with translation philosophy while the second with translation tools and criticism (Holmes, 1988 67-80). Others followed him and



saw a dialectic interaction between theory and application (Snell-Hornby, 1995 13-37; Van Leuven-Zwart, 1992 67-157; Baker, 1998 227-280). Regarding translation as a scientific field of inquiry, Van Leuven-Zwart divided it into theoretical study (*tot licht strekkende vertaalonderzoek*) which clarified the activity of translation and expository or applied study (*tot nut strekkende vertaalonderzoek*) which enunciated translating methods (Leuven-Zwart, 1992 67). M. Baker gave special significance to linguistic techniques and methods in translation studies (Baker, 1993 248).

The German translator Hans Vermeer introduced the concept of *skopos*theorie where the objectives of the translator and the targeted reader became more important than finding similarities between languages (Nord 1997; Kussmaul, 1995). Katherina Reiss and Vermeer saw a typical translation occupying the space between a translator's ability (knowledge and sensitivity) and interests (who commissions the translation). They visualized the text as an "information offer" by the producer to the receiver, an offer which provided information about the meaning and form of the source text (Reiss and Vermeer, 1996 14).

In the 1980s an attempt to chart the genealogy of translation centered on a historical survey of the theory and practice of translation and thereby created legitimacy for a specific breed of translation and translation studies (Holmes 1988). Generally speaking from the late 1980s translation studies began to lay down descriptive standards emphasizing textual strategies and cultural interpretations. The descriptive methodologies based on tools borrowed from comparative literature, history, linguistics, philosophy, ethnography, literary criticism, and semiotics reinvigorated the translations of the Bible such as *Afrikaans Bible* in 1983 by P. Groenewald and others (Naude, 2002 44). The metaphrasis or speaking across languages laid special emphasis on exactness or

one to one correspondence in language.

In subsequent decades scholars attempted to find normative standards used in different cultures and ethos as a part of a corpus centered post-colonial translation theory. The postcolonial enterprise of inverting the “great European Original” with the “colony as a copy or translation” was another attempt to theorize in inverse and demand recognition for another value judgment born out of marginalization and neglect. (Bassnett and Trivedi, 2002. 4). Foucault pointed out that prejudices are latent in conceptualizations, classifications, schemata and succession. There is always selection which is more emotional than logical (Foucault, 1972 56-57).

### **The Dialectics of Translation**

We have been increasingly made aware by European philosophers such as Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari of the dialectics of translations and the dynamics of translation studies in a hegemonizing world. These philosophers, have often seen translation either as an expedient means of academic survival or exegetical maneuver to valorize an ideology or belief. And in a postmodern world of ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ and crisis of the “university institution” all translations (or associated activities) have been looked upon with some suspicion (Lyotard, 1984 xxiii-xxiv). Lyotard found linguistic regimes as incommensurable and untranslatable and therefore any translation becoming hegemonic creating deadly consequences for the loser. He wrote,

The examination of language games...identifies and reinforces the separation of language from itself. There is no unity to language; there are islands of language, each of them ruled by a different regime, untranslatable into the others. This dispersion is good in itself, and ought

to be respected. It is deadly when one phrase regime prevails over the others (Lyotard, 1993: 20).

It is somewhat interesting to note that Lyotard differentiated between language translation and language games; He argued that languages can be translated but rules of one game cannot be translated into another. Also phrases and mathematical proof cannot be translated. He wrote,

Languages are translatable, otherwise they are not languages; but language games are not translatable, because if they were, they would not be language games. It is as if we wanted to translate the rules and strategies of chess into those of checkers....A move in bridge cannot be "translated" into a move made in tennis. The same goes for phrases, which are moves in language games; one does not "translate" a mathematical proof into a narration. Translation is itself a language game (Lyotard, 1979: 53; 1993: 21).

Lyotard looked at the act of translation with some suspicion and found translation working with a paradox of translatability and untranslatability. According to him certain "rules," "strategies" and "moves" were not translatable.

Today translation is seen as "transubstantiation" or the act of converting one text into another, where a translated poem feels like kissing a woman through a veil (Michaels, 1998 109). Herself a poet and writer, Anne Michaels goes on to elaborate that today the translation process hunts for details, exactitudes and language than for meaning and life.

You choose your philosophy of translation just as you choose how to live:

the free adaptation that sacrifices detail to meaning, the strict crib that sacrifices meaning to exactitude. The poet moves from life to language, the translator moves from language to life; both like the immigrant, try to identify the invisible, what's between the lines, the mysterious implications (Michaels, 1996, 109)

Michaels' tongue in cheek criticism of the translator's attempt to seek the "mysterious implications" through language is not lost on the reader. In an ironic twist the reader must seek to find meaning "between the lines" and not in the translated words themselves. If the attempt fails it would be just kissing the veil and not the woman at all.

Obviously translation is loaded with transforming ideas, defining cultures and perceiving others. Lorna Harwick endorses the idea of both creating and defining ideas about other cultures through the act of translation. She argues,

The relationship between the ancient (source) language and the target language is shaped by the translator in terms of his or her purpose in writing. It is also shaped by the way in which the target reader or audience is perceived and by the writer's judgment about how the impact of the Greek or Latin lines can effectively be communicated to those living in and through another language and another culture (Hardwick, 2000 10).

In the academic world we have increasingly come to realize that translation studies has little to do with the actual process of translation itself but more to do with the theory, interpretation and application of translation, guided by a socio-cultural and cultural-historical context. Actual translators or their translated texts are on the periphery of academic discussion on translations. Occasionally when

translation studies experts double up as actual translators they tend to negotiate the divide between theory and practice to the chagrin of many.

Deleuze and Guattari believe that translation is neither a 'simple' nor 'secondary' act but an 'impulse' to control and dominate. The actual translating paradigm consists of a "dissymmetrical necessity" of alternating between 'smooth' to the 'striated' spaces. We progress by/in striated spaces and we achieve 'becoming' in smooth spaces. To summarize their complex argument is to do injustice to them. So two important sections of the paragraph are rendered verbatim below:

Translating is not a simple act: it is not enough to substitute the space traversed for the movement; a series of rich and complex operations is necessary (Bergson was the first to make this point). Neither is translating a secondary act. It is an operation that undoubtedly consists in subjugating, overcoding, metricizing smooth space, in neutralizing it, but also in giving it a milieu of propagation, extension, refraction, renewal and impulse without which it would perhaps die of its own accord: like a mask without which it could neither breathe nor find a general form of expression .... Let us take just two examples of the richness and necessity of translations, which include as many opportunities for openings as risks of closures or stoppage: first, the complexity of the means by which one translates intensities into extensive quantities, or more generally, multiplicities of distance into systems of magnitudes that measure and striate them (the role of logarithms in this connection; second, and more important, the delicacy and complexity of the means by which Riemannian patches of smooth space receive a Euclidean conjunction (the role of the parallelism of vectors in striating the infinitesimal). The mode of connection proper to patches of Riemannian space ('accumulation') is

not to be confused with the Euclidean conjunction of Riemann space ('parallelism'). Yet the two are linked and give each other impetus. Nothing is ever done with: smooth space allows itself to be striated, and striated space reimparts a smooth space, with potentially very different values, scope, and signs. Perhaps we must say that all progress is made by and in striated space, but all becoming occurs in smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000 486).

Both Deleuze and Guattari point out that translation pushes the linguistic syntax to its very limits when it either becomes a painful wail, a la Kafka's *Metamorphosis* or lapses into silence like Ronald Sukenick's novel *Out*.

Translation dons the mask of death masquerading as a ruse of life. We do not return to the world of the living, we do not return to the real community which gave rise to it, but to a sterile valley of words negotiated by death. When translation fails to successfully negotiate the cultural divide it becomes creolized and enters the realm of what Anton Pipovic called translationality or prevodnost. And since English has become the global lingua franca the demand for translated minority texts have not only increased but translations are undertaken in the name of cultural alterity to increase demand. The various hegemonizing communication and distribution strategies which are fuelled by globalization are invariably located in the economies and politics of powerful nations.

### **Linguistic Globalization and Translation Studies**

Both economic and digital globalization has made the English language a global lingua franca forcing demands for translations from various linguistic sources. There are some cases where nationalist or regionalist pressures to protect minority cultures or alterity may strengthen the political identity of translation studies, it

should be remembered that in monocultures and protectionist forms of globalization, translation studies might either become weak or lose its identity. The proliferation of the Internet has reduced the cost of transportation and communication positively affecting the production of translated texts. Just as the introduction of paper from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries accelerated the demand for translations in Baghdad and Hispano, digitalized translations have further reduced cost and increased the speed and demand for translated texts. The growth of the printing press in the 15<sup>th</sup> century further accelerated the standardization of texts and spellings. During this time scholarly and nationalist discourses emerged emphasizing exactness of reproductions and presentation of individualist writing styles. The printing press together with newspapers in English gave rise to national languages and nationalist discourses.

The digital media further accelerated cultural crossings and trans-border exchanges encouraging the translation of culture and their dominant texts within a global lingua franca. Hegemonies exercised by cultures and homogenization of conventions play a significant role in translation studies. Salah Basalamah expresses similar sentiments when she states that,

A l'heure de la mondialisation homogénéisante des conventions, des normes et des lois, à l'ère de l'information instantanée, globale et multimédias, le pouvoir diffuse des discours dominants sur les moyens de production textuelle et les hiérarchies qui en découlent ne peut que reproduire un savoir normatif diffusé qui se conforme à la logique de l'hégémonie économique qui le sous-tend (Basalamah, 2008 262)

It is possible to see how the era of instantaneous information transfer has both modernized and homogenized conventions, norms and laws. The globalizing

multimedia possess the power to diffuse the dominant discourse of English through the textual production of hierarchies and force us to conform to the normative logic of a hegemonic economic discourse. However there is a danger in a global lingua franca. As English increasingly occupies a global space of linguistic dominance the need for translation will gradually diminish. If everyone speaks and understands the same language there would be less demand for translations. Apple, Microsoft and Google have introduced their own brand of Internet English which now millions of people use. Linguistic globalization would mean an end to translation studies.

Recent reports however indicate a rise in translations, a growth of a common lingua franca and a general decrease in the number of living languages (Venuti 1995, 1996; Brisset, 2004 339). The confusing and often paradoxical pattern show the relentless march of technology aided by state-sponsored translations which simultaneously spur the spread of English and a demand for translations. As globalization creates regional and national specialization the demand for manufactured products and translation of information into the target language also increases.

We assume that globalization is a new phenomenon creating neo-Ricardian specialization in trade but if we follow the arguments of F. A. Hayek in *Fatal Conceit* (1988) we understand that globalization is well over 8000 years old. It is during this time that the Catal Huyuk in Anatolia and Jericho in Palestine became the centers of trade between the Black and Red seas, increasing their populations and creating a cultural revolution the way we see now (Hayek, 1988 39). Today globalization is further accelerated by technologies and telecommunications. The prospect of reconstructing society and directing it towards a desirable social goal is what Hayek calls "social engineering." This



kind of constructivist rationalism often becomes interventionist when governments attempt to salvage an economic catastrophe. Often global interventionism, as in the wake of 2008 American financial crisis, needs both linguistic and cultural translations.

In the last two decades the institutional status of translation studies has become more respectable and the 'in thing' in the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic institutions, than in the Gallic ones. The French are still debating about its definition, content and disciplinary strength and trying to find an acceptable locus standi (Ballard, 2006). In the UK and other parts of the world where translation studies is a new fad since the 1970s, it has an interdisciplinary character cannibalizing on methodologies developed in history, linguistics, philosophy, semiotics, computer science, Russian formalism, the Linguistic Circle and literary theory. At times when it becomes normative it employs some of the tools of theology and moral science as well (Toury, 1995; Hermans, 1991, 155-69).

### **Normative Standards in Translation Studies**

Though translation studies have been preoccupied with the quality and accuracy of the translation itself it has not been able to develop globally accepted critical concepts. Since the last two decades setting standards and laying down norms has become the primary concern of translation studies. The normative debate has grown out of the 'Translation and Norms' Seminar held at Ashton University in February 1998 where scholars Gideon Toury and Theo Hermans contributed in opening up issues connected with the translational norms debate. Touray divided translational norms into three categories namely initial norms, preliminary norms and operational norms (Touray, 1995 53-59). Chesterman however categorized these norms as social, ethical and technical norms (Chesterman,

1997 51-85). He further sub-divided technical norms into production-oriented and product-oriented norms.

There seems to be no common agreement on the terminology or distinctions of clusters. Hatim believes that the knowledge in this area is rather confusing and there are many “contradictory normative models” (Hatim 2001, 70). Obviously norms play a significant role in what scholars assume and expect about the quality and correctness of the translation (Bartsch 1987, xii). Though initial translations done half a century ago depended heavily on applied linguistics, recently the cultural component has become stronger.

Like all other new disciplines translation studies in the true Kantian sense has attempted to locate cross-cultural differences and similarities to do accurate and acceptable translations. It is argued that a translational perspective that encompasses both the micro and macro levels must be incorporated in the translation process itself (Gopferich 2009 15; Trosborg, 1997). Susanne Gopferich explains that a translator develops a macro-strategy based on his “professional experience” and theoretical analysis vis-à-vis the text. Gopferich writes,

The source text projected into the translator’s mental reality becomes the object of mental processing or to be more precise, further mental processing, because the first reception also involves mental processing. This occurs on two different workspaces: the uncontrolled workspace and the controlled workspace.

Processing in the uncontrolled workspace involves the activation of frames and schemes, which are structured domains of long-term memory,

in associative processes. These associative processes give rise to expectations with regard to the prospective target text. Expectations with regard to structure, style, and content of a text forms part of any comprehension process; in translation, however, they are target-text-oriented.

Using the projected source text, the prospective target text, and data from their uncontrolled workspaces, competent translators develop a translation macro-strategy. What goes into this macro-strategy are not only the characteristics that are decisive for the target text, such as its function, its audience, and the medium in which it will appear, but also the options that translators have for searching information and verifying their subjective associations as well as for improving their subject domain knowledge (Gopferich, 2009 15).

Gopferich's translation discourse runs quite smoothly based on inexact and unproven psychological theory of controlled and uncontrolled workspaces in the translator's mind, as if the translating process is a simple binary exercise of well-organized structures. She assumes too much with phrases such as "structured domains of long-term memory," "comprehension process," and the idea of "competent translators" developing "macro-strategy." It is difficult to accept the idea that "long-term memory" functions within "structured domains." This ignores the fact that memory works around notions of selectivity, fantasies, wishful thinking, forgetfulness and what Deleuze calls "non-hallucinatory delusion in which mental integrity is retained without 'intellectual diminishment'" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000 119).

## **Cultural Translation**

Though translation studies has not been given to a precise definition or clear methodology, this has not distracted its practitioners from pulling in metaphors of cultural transformation or the changes that cultures undergo when translated, into translation studies. The harnessing of cultural changes also brings in ethnography, and with it ethnographic anthropologists who conduct field work with the same imaginary ardor like novelists. In *Available Light* Clifford Geertz questions the very nature of his anthropological profession and confesses that experimenting with the *bildungsroman* tradition in conducting ethnographic research would not be a bad idea (Geertz, 2000 3).

Cultural translation (Spivak, 1993) has brought translation into the cultural and political ambit but along the way forgotten about translation itself. The cultural spin in translation studies (Bassnett and Lefereve, 1990) has shifted the focus from formalist exercises to insipid translations muddied by social historical analysis. Annie Brisset is therefore rather critical of translation as it involves both domination and control:

Translation becomes an act of reclaiming, of recentering of the identity, a re-territorializing operation. It does not create a new language, but it elevates a dialect to the status of a national and cultural language (Brisset, 2004 340).

Since every translation implies an act of intervention it re-imagines identity within the realms of politics, culture, geography and language.

It is possible to understand that textual works emerge in a specific discursive and historical space and possess no unity. Each period of time organizes translation

of the text around certain rules which are guided by all kinds of factors—ranging from discriminations, repressions, literary codes, linguistic practices and publishing processes. A universal and unified discourse of translation must bring together all the rules of all the historical times and incorporate their transformations and discontinuities. Can this be possible? Foucault argued in *Archaeology of Knowledge* that this is impossible.

Then what do we mean by phrases such as “essential literal translation?” Can a translator capture the words, style and context of a writer? Can there be a “word-for-word” translation with acceptable fine tuning of grammar, syntax and idiom to fit the target language? How far can there be a transparency of translation that reveals the original text and the context to the reader? If a word-for word translation fails then can we accept “thought-for-thought” translation which emphasizes dynamic equivalence as against literal meaning? The thought-for-thought translation has its limitations too. Interpreting thoughts from one language into another invariably introduces the opinions, understanding and cultural underpinnings of the translator. Can we make a tradeoff between precise translation and readable translation that is between formal expression and functional communication? Can we capture echoes, overtones and nuances while doing all this? These are some of the questions that remain unanswered.

The ontology and the history of being are embedded in the syntax and vocabulary of language and they determine the “internal structures” of communities, what Jurgen Habermas calls “linguistic world disclosure.” The world disclosure function helps the community to conceptualize the world they live in and its rational and irrational aspects (Habermas, 2001 144). If this is the case it is highly fallacious that a competent translator would be able to understand and translate effectively the world disclosure functions.

### **Evaluating the Translated Text—Scholar or the Public**

If it is not possible for the translator to translate the text accurately then he could at least trans-create the text. In the 1990s many translation studies scholars and literary artists began to believe that a translator's work was similar to that of a creative artist and therefore a translated text revealed the identity of the translator just as it did that of the original writer. The presence of the translator within the translated text gained currency and became a part of a subtheme of human agency within a text. The other question of who should evaluate the quality of the translated text was rather difficult to settle. The academic elite, the common public and the creative artist all claimed their central role to evaluate a translated text.

Novelist and poet Vladimir Nabokov answered some of these questions with tongue-in-cheek statements. When involved with the translation and annotation of Pushkin's *Onegin*, a Russian novel in verse, he held the translator in somewhat low esteem. Nabokov called a regular translator of poetry a 'drudge' or a 'rhymester' who substituted "easy platitudes for the breathtaking intricacies of the text" (Nabokov, 2000/2002 39). However he felt that as a meticulous reader of Pushkin and also a fellow practitioner of the same craft he would attempt to be exact to his "vision" and if he failed he would give up the endeavor. Nabokov explained his position as a translator as follows:

I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity. I want such footnotes and the absolutely literal sense, with no emasculation and no padding—I want such sense and such notes for all the poetry in other tongues that still languishes in 'poetical' versions. Begrimed and beslimed by rhyme. And

when my Onegin is ready, it will either conform exactly to my vision or not appear at all (Nabokov, 2002 127).

Nabokov's idealistic perspective of translation forces the text to "conform" exactly to his "vision" if it is to see the light of day.

Octavio Paz follows the writer's prerogative and celebrates translation as the essential characteristic of any language.

Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation—first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase (Paz, 1992 154).

Paz is not alone voicing his views on the eternally imitative characteristic of language and hence translation. A host of other writers from Gabriel Marquez and Jorge Luis Borges to Carlos Fuentes express the same sentiment:

Obviously the process of translation cannot escape the vision or interpretation of the translator. Both literal and symbolic meaning that the translator employs escapes the linguistic register of two languages he is working with. Eugene Nida argues that,

Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact

translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail .... One must not imagine that the process of translation can avoid a certain degree of interpretation by the translator (Nida, 2002: 153).

It is only possible to approximate the meaning of the source text but never be able to establish an “absolute correspondence” between the source text and target text.

The translator however believes that the general public is the best judge of his translation and not the literary critic. Francis Newman’s spirited response to Mathew Arnold’s criticism of the former’s translation of Homer is worthy of note. Newman claimed,

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 (Newman, 1914 313-77).

Translation according to Newman is not a matter of scholarship or exactness but of public “taste.”

In his essay “Des Tours de Babel” Derrida admits that translation in the “proper sense” and “figurative sense” is not easy to overcome. But he argues that a translator possesses the right to “speak *about* translation in a place which is more than any not second or secondary” (Derrida, 1992 226-7). And if the writer wishes a translation he should be eternally grateful to the translator. Derrida



argues that the writer would be in debt of the translator if he had set forth a requirement to be translated:

For if the structure of the original is marked by the requirement to be translated, it is that in laying down the law the original begins by indebting itself *as well* with regard to the translator. The original is the first debtor, the first petitioner; it begins by lacking and by pleading for translation (Derrida, 1992 227).

Derrida opens up the space for the legitimacy of translation if the structure of the text demands it. Therefore intention and interpretation are intrinsically linked in a translation.

Derrida's position about translation would give authenticity to the translator and the translated text. Translation in turn would be an equally valuable discourse of representation as the original text is. Pierre Bourdieu believes that since the translator is involved in a highly creative endeavor his work also constitutes a cultural capital just as that of the creative artist (Bourdieu, 2000 20, 181). However most translations are conducted within the "scholastic enclosures" which are invariably built far away from the "vicissitudes of the real; world" and do not participate in the general ethos of the lived experience which text usually enshrine (Bourdieu, 2000 40-41).

### **Linguistic Untranslatability**

Though translation studies seem to be rooted in practical application it has not produced a "comprehensive theory" that can work as a guideline in translations (Lefevere, 1975). Many scholars of translation studies have brought up the problem of substitution or transference between source language and target

language. Over four decades ago Catford brought up this problem by opening up the debate. He argued that translations either substituted or transferred meaning from one language into another. Both these processes he felt must be “clearly differentiated” in translation (Catford, 1965 32-37).

Bassnett divides translation studies into four target areas. The first area she calls history of translation which connects it to theories, processes, functions and publishing patterns. The second area deals with translation in the target language culture involving the socio-cultural influence of text and author. The third area refers to translation and linguistics related to phonetics, syntax, lexicography and equivalence. The final area she calls translation and poetics dealing with literary translations, theories and practice. According to her the first and second conduct a “widespread” evaluation of translation and deal with the issue of translation between non-related languages (Bassnett, 2002 22-65).

### **Chomsky’s Universal Rationalism**

The translator faces a reader who does not share the background or worldview of the original source text reader. The reader of the target text possesses different history, social practice and worldview. Now there is a problem. The way we respond to a text is shaped by our cognitive understanding which in turn is culturally defined. What we in philosophy call relativism. In the 1960s Noam Chomsky rejected relativism in translation and advocated the idea of a universal rationalism, one of the dangerous totalities that most post-moderns deride (Chomsky, 2006 171). Anyway Chomsky believed that universal rationalism homogenized concepts and practices amongst the 4000-odd languages which possessed the same syntactical structure. Given this conclusion it was possible to translate from source to target text. Chomsky made the task of the translator relatively easy limiting it to a linguistic exercise. However if you follow

philosophical relativism it would imply that the translator must not only be aware of different vocabularies but also different philosophical concepts and historical and cultural contexts (Jacobson, 1959, 232-39).

### **Philosophical Relativism and Rational Totalities**

The controversy regarding relativism and rational totalities continue unabated for over two decades and has not been settled yet. The debate centers on the idea that over a period of time the original text does not remain the same. Therefore there is no real equivalence between the target text and the source text. Enrique Bernárdez established a *via media* by establishing a theory of self-regulating communication which a translator can use (Bernárdez, 1997 1-14). This theory assumes that translation can move either in the direction of equilibrium or entropy. Bernárdez advocates that a translator adjust the context during translation towards equilibrium and away from entropy. This would give the translated text comprehension and retain the original structure.

Translation is a timeless machine of production and distribution, a parasitic apparatus with a voracious appetite to transform an inaccessible text into a good or second-rate reading. The new area called translation studies fawns before an audience that would allow the aspiring discipline to work while at the same time it theorizes, selects and sets up a stage to perform and control. If translation must succeed it must be 'relevant by vocation' and must ensure the "survival of the body of the original" (Derrida, 2001 199). This is easier said than done. The task of the translator is doubly difficult as he must ensure exactness and *fortleben* or living on (Benjamin, 1968 69-82). Both translation and translation studies have the difficult task of ensuring the survival of two linguistic bodies and their contexts through mediation and theorizing. Will they succeed? Most writers say they will; some philosophers say it is rather doubtful.

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