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Negotiation theory as an approach to translation history: an inductive lesson from fifteenth-century Castile

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International regimes and calling off-sides

Translation history, like translation studies in general, suffers many of the problems of the soccer linesmen who, whenever an attacking pass is made, have to correlate simultaneously the moment the ball is sent and the contextual position of the potential receiver. That is, the line referee has to be able to look in two directions and at two (or three) players at once, just as the translation analyst should be able to consider two cultures and two writers (plus at least one potential reader) at once. In both cases the task is materially difficult and the correlations are frequently erroneous. In the case of soccer, mistakes are nowadays made obvious by wide-angle camera lenses that perceive far more than can the merely human referee close to the game down there on the field. In the case of translation, however, it is difficult to find a theoretical frame wide enough to take in both moments at once. Traditional attention is directed towards the sending side, underlining fidelity to the author's intentions or the need to understand correctly the source text's type and function, thus declaring many otherwise quite intelligent translational passes to be off-side. Alternatively, through over-reaction, contemporary systemic and purpose-based approaches tend to focus on the target side, analyzing translations as new texts in their own right and thus potentially legitimizing contextual positions that more attentive referees would declare flagrantly illicit. If disputes are to be resolved, what we need is a translational version of the wide-angle lense, or at least sufficient conceptual distance for the two lines to be seen in one look.

Regime theory was developed for neither translation studies nor football, but it might provide the kind of frame I am looking for. The most interesting versions have to do with negotiation studies, where they replaced the vocabulary of international systems in the course of the 1970s. In that context, regimes were most simply defined as "sets of governing arrangements organizing relations of interdependence" (Keohane and Nye 1977:19). A later collective definition was a little more detailed:

“A regime is made up of explicit or implicit sets of principles, norms, rules and negotiation procedures in terms of which actor expectations converge on a field of international relations and through which the individual behaviour of these actors can be coordinated.” (Conference on International Regimes, Los Angeles 1980; in Finlayson et al. 1981:563)

Instead of analyzing confrontations and transfers between independent systems, regime theory focuses on negotiation procedures themselves as a space organized by its own inter-systemic principles. For instance, instead of merely contrasting the different systems of agricultural subsidies in the EEC and the United States, regime theory would consider the way negotiators representing these systems come together and broadly agree on the terms in which their differences can be discussed (the GATT regime). Even when, as in this particular example, the negotiations are relatively unsuccessful and the systems appear incompatible, the regime can still be said to exist to the extent that the participants agree to keep talking. Instead of preserving the distance between two opposed systems, this approach tries to bring them together in a common space for dialogue and exchange. Regime theory thus does not assume that the two initial systems are fundamentally the same; it depends on neither cultural specificity nor human universals; it does not exclude conventions of reciprocal sovereignty. But it does force one to look at the way different parties come together and interact.

Can this basic idea be applied to translation studies? Could it enable us to look in two directions at once? Is it possible to formulate any properly translational regimes?

In a previous discussion of these problems (Pym 1992:140-145) I assumed that the formulation of translational regimes would have to be based on the networks by which objects (merchandise, travellers, texts) move from culture to culture, just as the off-side rule is based on the material passing of the football. Regimes could then be the general rules by which translators represent and act within transfer networks; they would be the rules enabling discussion if translators and authors from the cultures concerned came together and talked about their actions; the components of regimes would probably be like the off-side principle itself. But this distinction between the material fact and the abstract rule also has a certain spatial consequence, since the gaining of the wider vision is based on hypothetical elimination of the material distance involved: on the level of networks, it is obvious that sources and targets are materially separated, but the level of regimes works as if they were mutually present and engaged in at least some kind of dialogue. The double network/regime approach should thus enable two complementary acts of perception, the first assessing the distance essential for any decision about off-sides, the second assuming the simultaneity necessary for the actual taking of such decisions. But is this second aspect, the assumption of mutual presence, adequate to the nature of translation? Can it be assumed that translators are somehow in

direct contact with authors or with each other, across the time and space of material distance?

The comparison with negotiations is perhaps not entirely illusory: translators do indeed negotiate with their clients, texts, and sometimes with their authors or other translators, and we have, in this day and age, certain self-styled “translation summits” which use a negotiation metaphor to discuss the way translation is taught. But there is also a certain sociological underpinning to the idea of mutual presence: since translators themselves are by definition intercultural subjects (they know foreign languages and cultures) and work within intercultural networks (they receive and read foreign texts), the basic rules of their activity should perhaps also be intercultural. They could even be part of small intercultural epistemic communities, along with other professional intermediaries. If this is so, their behaviour should be explained in terms of shared intercultural regimes rather than individual cultural systems. Or so said my theory, conveniently based on the later nineteenth century, a time of extremely complex transfer networks, expansionist European cultures and marginalized translators. Was this theory merely a product of its application? Was it shedding light, or merely words?

In order to extend my approach and test its initial validity, I propose to apply the notion of regimes to a quite different situation, far away from the later nineteenth century, and far away, indeed, from late twentieth-century Finland. But the trip should not be too painful.

Fifteenth-century Castile without a regime

My example comes almost entirely from the one secondary source, Nicholas Round’s “*Libro llamado Fedrón*”, which analyses a 1455 rendering of Plato’s *Phaedo* into Castilian, translated by one Pero Díaz de Toledo from Leonardo Bruni’s previous Latin version. Professor Round’s superbly written study is the most complete sociological and linguistic analysis I have found of a single translation. His analysis might crudely be summarized as follows:

1. There is disagreement about whether fifteenth-century Castile should be described as properly humanist (part of the Renaissance led by the Italians) or still essentially medieval.

2. This 1455 translation of Plato would suggest that Castilian culture was indeed humanist, since the translation appears to have been the first rendering of Plato into a vernacular language.

3. However, analysis of the text and context of this translation reveals that the Castilian reception differed significantly from the humanist models developed in Italy, where Plato was translated into Latin. This suggests that fifteenth-century Castile was more medieval than properly humanist.

One could further simplify the matter: Castile was perhaps like Italy; Plato entered both Castile and Italy; but the mode of translation was different, so Castile was not like Italy.

Now, it is quite legitimate and interesting for a Hispanist to ask how fifteenth-century Castile should be described and then to use translation analysis in order to answer that question. But if my prime concern is the history of translation itself, and if I hypothesize that this history can and should be based on translational regimes, my questions should be more like the following:

1. Were there any intercultural principles (or norms, or conventions...) of translation, be they humanist, medieval or otherwise?
2. Can the translational activity of someone like Pero Díaz de Toledo be described in terms of such principles?
3. Can his activity tell us what kind of regime we should have today?

I thus propose to read Round's study from this rather different perspective (all page references will be to his text, unless indicated otherwise), making it clear from the outset that, for my concerns as a historian of translation, it does not particularly matter how one describes fifteenth-century Castile. If a description of some kind should be produced along the way, all well and good, but it is not an end in itself. Nor do I believe that a description of a translational regime should be an end in itself: to tell all, I am doing translation history in order to question and orient the interculturality of our shared present, which is all we have.

Fifteenth-century Castile within a network

Round's study mentions numerous channels of communication between Castile and Italy. There were summits like the Councils of Basle and Florence, which "brought Spanish delegates into direct touch with humanists and their way" (69), just as there were numerous visits of cultured Italians to Spain (70). Spanish students went to study in Bologna; the rulers of Naples were at that time Aragonese. Castile was also exporting wool to Florence, a trade which exceeded its purely commercial importance: the humanist translator Bruni not only rendered Plato into Latin but was an interested member of the Florentine cloth importers and merchants guilds (72) and was thus quite aware of what was happening in Castile. There was no shortage of contacts across the Pyrenees, and these contacts could quite easily connect the Italian and Castilian translators of Plato.

The contacts were moreover not limited to Italy. Castile was subject to French and Burgundian cultural influences (64); most of the texts translated into Catalan were in fact translated from French versions (Russell 1985:19-20) and there was considerable professional mobility: two Portuguese translators working from Latin to Portuguese

could go to work for the Burgundian court as translators from Latin into French (Russell 44). Studies abroad and a certain circulation of intellectual labour existed well before the Erasmus programmes and the Single European Act.

These contacts and exchanges would appear to have been so developed that it would be difficult to deny that most European translators must have shared much the same interculturality, if only because of shared knowledge of Latin and the transcultural influence of the Church. Surely they translated within this shared intercultural network?

But this is not where the argument lies. There is no dispute on the level of material networks as such. The problem arises when Round, among others, concludes that although Italian scholarship was readily available to Castilians, for some reason they were not really interested in it (72, 75). They developed an “odd, selective imperviousness” to humanist influences (66). So, despite a manifestly intercultural network, was there a specifically Castilian translational regime?

Fifteenth-century Castile within a regime

Round demonstrates that the Castilian translator Pero Díaz received and translated the Italian’s *Phaedo* but remained uninterested in any revelation of Plato as a non-Christian thinker. He was simply not concerned by this aspect of his source text: “The historical question of what Plato’s beliefs actually were took second place to the pragmatic question of the uses to which his doctrines could be put” (127). This means that Plato was translated as if he had been a Christian authority *avant la lettre*, a good pagan (129), with general suppression of the aspects that made him of interest to humanist culture. It would indeed seem that there was a very profound difference between the Italian and Castilian modes of reception.

Round explains these differences in terms of the Castilian precept that literature should “educate great lay personages in the ethical foundations of right conduct” (107). The ensuing regime, which Round extracts from both the social context and from theoretical comments by Cartagena, would thus have differed from the humanist model in the following ways:

a) *Castilian translation was into the vernacular*, whereas the Italians translated into Latin and debated its relative virtues (65).

b) *Target-text intelligibility had priority over source-text eloquence*, tending to a limitation of Latinist syntax and excessive loan-words (108).

c) *Considerable expansion and slight deletion were acceptable strategies* when they made the text easier to digest, independently of implicit or explicit source-text content (137-138). Most translations were considerably longer than their originals and included glosses and didactic introductions.

As Round notes, Pero Díaz's Plato was more or less in accordance with all these principles: the Castilian translation simplified and explained the dialogue form (indicating the speakers etc.), elaborated cultural references (161), used minor abridgement to make complex passages easier to understand (159), and remained essentially without critical comment, since the purpose of the translation was to relay a supposedly authoritative doctrine. Interestingly enough, these might be the sort of strategies I myself use when translating badly written economic reports into English: without ever criticizing what I translate, I make the texts as understandable as possible for the new reader.

Round notes that Pero Díaz made his source text easier to understand in most aspects except terminology, where there was a certain reluctance to use loan-words or glosses: the translation "seeks out clear, self-explanatory equivalents for specialized Latin lexis, rather than falling back on exotic calques" (137). There are crucial examples like Plato's distinction between *λογος* ("verbal definition") and *υποθεσις* ("logical postulate"), loosely captured by Bruni as *ratio* and *positio*, but almost entirely lost in the Castilian opposition of *razón* and *opinión*. Or again, Plato's *ειδος*, *ιδεα* and *μορφη*, which in Bruni become *specias* (for the first two) and *forma*, are then remixed through Castilian with the triad *especie*, *forma* and *esencia*, which, as Round remarks, "all had more immediate associations in medieval Aristotelian philosophy, none of them helpful for present purposes" (166). The priority accorded to target-text function thus meant that the reader was highly unlikely to appreciate Plato as anything but a medieval Christian philosopher. As Round observes, this refusal of certain key loan words or of complex reasoning "ensured that new material brought over into the language would find ways of expression compatible with what older authorities had to say" (145). In short, it was a use of "innovative practices to support a basically orthodox and conservative cultural strategy" (144 n). Part of Round's study is called *Plato in Spain*, but there must be some doubt as to whether Plato ever actually got there.

It might thus appear that the Castilian and Italian regimes were so different that if two translators like Leonardo Bruni and Pero Díaz de Toledo had come together to discuss their work, they would have been talking at cross-purposes. There would have been no profound mutual understanding, no underlying intercultural premises: the Italian would have wanted to explain Plato; the Castilian would not have cared. Spain was different, and not merely because of the basic asymmetry presupposed on the level of networks. Or so says the historical analysis of fifteenth-century Castile.

However, why should such an analysis focus exclusively on cultural differences? Why look only at Castile? There can be no doubt that the two translators shared a certain common ground, but can it be argued that they perhaps shared more than their differences, that there was a regime enabling intercultural exchange?

I believe a shift to more general principles enables us to concoct a short list of shared intercultural elements that not only might have constituted just such a translational regime, but might also explain why the one regime could have allowed different ways of translating:

a) *Translation should be word-for-word in the case of authoritative sacred texts and sense-for-sense in other cases.* The principle of sacred literalness is of course neither Castilian nor Italian: it came from Jerome (131) and was to dominate a fairly big chunk of European history (perhaps down to and including Newmark). But Round points out why these terms were of particular importance to fifteenth-century Catholics: the word-for-word argument had recently been used to distance the Lollard and Hussite heresies (133-134). Thus, although the Renaissance tendency was away from literalism, thought on translation still had to pay lip service to the idea of sacred authoritative texts (141), not only in Spain, but in France and England as well (Russell 19).

b) *There is a natural hierarchy among languages* (115-117, 124, 138). As a correlative of the above principle, distinctions had to be made between the languages of revelation, international Latin, and the vernaculars, with the last-mentioned on the lowest rung of authoritative value (Russell 12-16). There could thus be no talk of equality between languages. Since the terms of this hierarchy owed much to St Isidore and could be found in Bruni, Cartagena, Pero Díaz and many others, it is a strong candidate for a position in an intercultural translational regime. Bruni and his generation undoubtedly construed the hierarchy in such a way that Latin became the theoretical repository of grammatical perfection (116), but this does not mean that the hierarchy itself did not enjoy wider intercultural status.

c) *Each language has its inherent mode of expression* (139). Inequality did not mean that the lowest rung was entirely without value, since the vernacular could also have its inherent qualities, its mode of talking or “*manera de fablar*”, which should be respected and used. This notion of target-language specificity, which could be an undeveloped Sapir-Whorf hypothesis without any assumed equality, was not only common to other fifteenth-century theorists like Bessarion and Manetti but could also be traced back to Jerome (142; Russell 27). That is, although the “*manera de fablar*” idea undoubtedly permitted Pero Díaz a relatively communicative mode of translation and a reduced degree of Latinization, its basic principle was by no means purely Castilian.

d) *Vernaculars can be enriched.* If there was a hierarchy, it followed that the superiority of Latin could be used to improve the lexis and syntax of inferior languages. We thus find extensive Latinization of the Italian and French vernaculars (140; Russell 19-20) and a “cautious but favourable attitude to neologism and loan words” in Castilian (142, 145), where earlier translators had used paraphrase instead of bringing in Latinisms (151). But this principle clearly contradicts the “*manera de fablar*” idea,

which suggests that Latinization is not strictly necessary and that translations should first be understood on the level of content.

e) *Vacillation is acceptable*. The traces of this contradiction appear in considerable inconsistency in the Castilian use of Latinisms, particularly with respect to syntax. But if, as Round states, it was acceptable to present vacillation between Latin and vernacular models (156) such that the vacillation itself might even have been “a feature of educated Castilian speech at this time” (157), surely the intercultural contradiction that was producing a translational debate about the status of Latin in Italy was also producing parallel although minor tensions in Castile? That is, the theoretical discussions underlying the choice between Latin and Italian also had their counterpart in Castilian stylistic vacillation. Neither was the translation of the other, but both responded to an intercultural contradiction on the level of a shared regime. This suggests that Pero Díaz could well have understood Bruni’s desire to translate into Latin, but was involved in a different way of manifesting that desire. The intercultural regime presented a common problem; the two translation cultures developed different ways of solving it.

Castile and Italy were different, but their different ways of translating ensued from a shared translational regime.

Lessons from inductive analysis

The study of a distanced translation regime may usefully reveal some of the more invisible principles of our own regimes. For instance, the fact that we no longer believe in the ideological hierarchy of sacred and vernacular languages reveals supposed lingual equality as one of our contemporary European principles (although the hierarchy idea returns in African and Asian contexts, where the languages of revelation have had their role taken over by the Western languages transferring technology).

But there are also many common elements that comparison enables us to assess more critically than would otherwise be the case. As we have seen, many of the basic principles and practices involved in this fifteenth-century translation of Plato are used and taught in our schools today. I myself train students to explain cultural references, to make difficult texts easier to read, and to accord priority to target-culture function; I tend to offer rather fewer references to the problems of source-text comprehension. But what were the historical consequences of this target-side functionalism? Within two generations, the Castile that Pero Díaz was translating for had conquered Granada, expelled most of its remaining Jews, invaded America and instigated the Inquisition. How different would history have been if this intensely Christian Castile had received some real notion of pre-Christian philosophy? To what extent did target-side translation strategies retard the arrival of Renaissance enlightenment in the international

superpower of the day? The first lesson to be learnt from fifteenth-century Castile might well be that functional adaptation is not necessarily synonymous with progress.

But there are other, more general lessons to be learnt.

Most obviously, we find that mere data on the level of the network - the date and fact of the Plato translation - are inadequate historical indicators if not accompanied by an analysis of the regime within which the translation was carried out. Although I have previously argued that the mode of translation should be seen as a response to the material reasons for the transfer, I must admit it is difficult to understand why this particular translator should have tackled Plato at all, and it is thus all the more difficult to attribute his motivation to the reasons behind the equally underdetermined presence of the Latin text in Spain. One can lead a horse to water, but merely material presence cannot transfer refreshment to a culture that is essentially unthirsty (or has already drunk from a hidden intercultural source).

Perhaps less obviously, it can also be argued that the regimes most pertinent to translation are based on wide intercultural precepts which may, in certain cases, manifest contradictions leading to culturally specific solutions. That is, translational regimes are first intercultural, then culture-specific. But should one then organize their principles in terms of hierarchies that go from the most generally implicated ideas to the more temporarily instituted formulations? Whereas my inclination has so far been to look for the internal ideological coherence of particular intercultural regimes - just as the Hispanist professionally looks for the coherence of fifteenth-century Castile - , it may prove more fruitful to isolate the contradictions occurring at the higher levels of the hierarchies and then trace their effects through to incoherences at lower levels. But it may even be wrong to suppose that there is any strict hierarchy at all, since regimes could equally comprise a loosely bound collection of principles which only receive partial weighting when confronted with particular intercultural situations. These questions require further inductive analysis.

Nevertheless, the important point is that historians of translation can use regime theory to look in two directions at once, not just in the interests of more complete descriptions, but also ultimately to determine the possible existence of licit and illicit passes. After all, if the off-side rule makes football intelligent, it might yet do something similar for translation history.

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