

Transfere non semper necesse est

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«In which it is argued that there is too much translation in Europe, that effective integration depends on degrees of nontranslated communication, and that an exclusive focus on translation seriously obscures our vision of a unified future».

A few months ago I attended a translation-studies conference where the official programmatic text began as follows:

La communauté européenne qui est en train de se construire possède cette caractéristique unique d'être multilingue et de prétendre respecter les particularismes linguistiques et culturels par l'usage de toutes les langues lors de ses débats, c'est dire que la traduction y occupe une place de choix (*Colloque Europe et traduction*, Artois, March 1996).

If I may translate (and I don't intend to outlaw the practice):

The European Union that is being constructed is unique in that it is not only multilingual but also seeks to respect its linguistic and cultural specificities through the use of all languages in its debates. This means that translation has pride of place.

The main features of this text can be found in the speeches of virtually all well-interpreted members of the European Parliament, in the glossy brochures of vir-

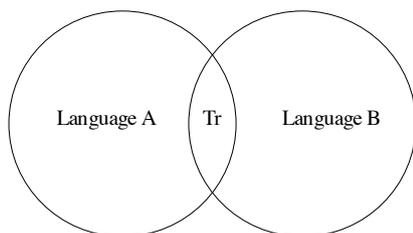
tually any translation school in Europe, in the introduction to several hundred well-meaning publications on European translation. Nothing new here: Europe means translation, and the more we have of both, the better.

Speaking at the conference in question I had the bad taste and worse manners to point out that although the conference itself was certainly in Europe, and although it was ostensibly a space for a European debate, the languages accepted for use were restricted to two (French and English) and there were no interpreters in sight. So much for respecting «l'usage de toutes les langues»! In practice, European multilingualism in a specific domain meant a restriction to two languages, and two is often pragmatically reduced to one.

Don't get me wrong: I am not particularly upset that there were no interpreters feeding my words into a dozen or so languages at that conference. I simply wanted to point out that the practical alternative to translation was a local language policy, a restriction to two, and a supposition that the conference participants knew enough of two to make do. I spoke goddam awful French and trusted the French could follow me; others spoke English and hoped for the same; and communication proceeded, as much as it merited to do so, largely thanks to the

preselection of participants willing and able to negotiate the vicissitudes of bilingual exchange. This was indeed a practical and effective regime, none the least because the added cost of interpreting services would have meant that I, along with any other unsubsidized soul, could not have afforded to attend. Translation is expensive and often unnecessary; non-translation is cheap and can be effective. Yet this concerns more than efficiency.

Of course there is a minor paradox here. A conference on translation, precisely, should need minimal translating. Indeed, translators and their academic representatives could be defined as the group of people requiring least recourse to translation. They tend to be actively at least bilingual and passively polyglot. We could picture this roughly as follows:



The drawing is crude, to be sure. Yet if I repeat it often enough, someone might eventually see what I have to say. In the middle is this Tr standing for Translator, living and working in an overlap, a middle ground, an intersection formed by two languages (we might say the same for cultures). This intersection might have a certain geopolitical basis, perhaps the twelfth-century Toledo of the Jewish and Mozarab intermediaries, the island of Pharos where 72 rabbis supposedly produced the Septagint, the Central Asian regions where 176 equally legendary monks transmitted the Buddhist sutras from India to China, even the Brussels that now houses the world's largest ever translation bureau. Thanks to such over-

laps, with or without underlying soil, translators can translate. And because of the same overlaps, at least in term of lingual competence, they can often do without translation. Let's call the overlap «interlingual space» («intercultural» if we want to talk about cultures), insisting that the «inter-» refers to shared space; it is not blithely qualifying any old movement from one side to the other (the prefixes for which should be «cross-» or indeed «trans-»). The intersecting circles might thus be the glasses I use to look at translation, and the interlingual place and role of the translator is, for me, as plain as the nose on my face. Not everyone can see their own nose, which is why I hold up this mirror.

I want to make two general points about the model:

First, the discourse of translation denies it. More exactly, that which makes a translation a translation (the general assumption that A 'translates as' B) omits or jumps over possible intersections, presupposing from the outset that A and B exist in separate languages, texts, worlds, cultures, whatever. The discourse of translation, no matter what kind of translation, projects initial separateness; it draws a border; it conceals the position of the translator. You can see the border in paratexts (references to two titles, two languages), in translator's footnotes (separated by a line from the translation proper), in inserted foreign words [*Wörter*] (the lines are shorter and vertical, but lines nevertheless), in interpreters' booths (input and output are not supposed to meet), not to mention the hundred or so theoretical models that show a lot of A and B but rarely leave room for an interlingual Tr. As for active concealment of interlingual positions, ask yourself why translators cannot say and mean «I» when translating, since every «I» they pronounce automatically refers to someone else, somewhere else, on the other side of a lingual border, a division that exists in translation but vir-

tually nowhere else. I don't care how much fancy theory can be cited in defence of translations as hybrids, decentring and subversive purveyors of difference, pathways of unity and understanding, all things to all people. Translation itself builds the lingual borders it then claims to transcend; it separates, and in so doing makes us overlook the interlingual noses on our faces.

Second, the above model concerns more than translation conferences. Almost any European conference in the sciences, and increasingly in the humanities, will have a local language regime limited to one or two. Where there are two (say, English plus the local language), interpreting services may be available, and hard-working interpreters are often bemused and occasionally dismayed to leave their booths and find conference participants conversing quite freely in bad English and associated mixes. More generally, the interlingual position of the translator is increasingly that of anyone with recourse to international exchange: diplomats, negotiators, travellers, academics, teachers, journalists, scientists, explorers and traders of all kinds, high-class prostitutes, top-flight footballers, occasional football coaches, politicians. Although not necessarily agents of international peace and understanding, such people do increasingly work between languages. The list of intermediaries might also include more dubious figures like spies, traffickers of drugs and arms, unscrupulous tourist promoters, experts in ecological dumping, political insurgents, hegemonic colonizers and occupying armies. True, these are the people that occasionally create work for translators. Yet they do so because they are formally in the same interlingual position as translators. Further, if and when they choose to learn from their situation, these same people can often *do without* translation. The paradox of the translator concerns more than translators.

Let me briefly pursue this logic. When do these interlingual figures actually require translation? When do they not need it? A rationalist answer, based on cost-benefit analysis (on which, see my paper on 'Transaction Costs'), would have to focus on the time factor involved. If the exchange relation is short-term, perhaps a one-off visit to a foreign country or an international negotiation designed to resolve a transitory dispute, then it is clearly more beneficial to employ translators than to make everyone learn enough languages to be their own translator. If, however, the exchange relation is long-term, perhaps an established trade relation or repeated contacts as a part of a profession, it is simply much cheaper to learn languages than to keep employing translators. The question of needs is essentially a question of time. One should thus ask if «the European Union that is being constructed» is a short-term or long-term project. One should ask if it is leading to greater or smaller degrees of interlingual spaces. One might even ask if the enormous translation costs currently involved could actually prevent our exchanges from becoming substantially long-term. Coulmas estimated that some 40% of the administration budget of the EC of 12 was due to its language policy; one shudders to calculate the theoretical added percentage for each new official language in the expanding EU.

To ask such questions is to go beyond the logic inscribed in the discourse of translation. If one is to believe in translation, in the people who support and live from translations, translation is always necessary and that's the end of the story. But if one begins by looking at interlingual space, the only real question is how we ever came to believe in translation so much. How did we ever get to this ideal *usage de toutes les langues* and the associated theories?

Several reasons:

First, there is a wide gap between the official discourse and what actually hap-

pens on the ground. Despite claims to respect multilingualism through translation, the European Commission deploys what is called a «real needs policy», which basically incorporates use of a *lingua franca* or the use of passive competences wherever possible, as happened in the French-English conference cited above. This tends to mean that the more specialized the meetings, the less there are interpreters present. The official discourse on translation is thus largely produced for external consumption, to keep the masses and academics happy.

Second, because the official discourse exists, many translations are carried out for purely symbolic purposes. Here, for example, I have the minutes of a meeting of financial experts to discuss the implementation of company registers in Europe. The meeting took place three months ago, in English, with all sorts of exotic calques and deviances indicating a rather non-English interlanguage through which the specialists understood each other. And yet now, three months later, these minutes have to be translated into French, even though all the potential readers obviously already have passive competence in English. If this kind of translation is necessary, it is for political rather than economic reasons: the French, at least, can claim that their language is still of some importance in this particular field.

Third, there is a certain cynical interest invested in maintenance of the official discourse and its symbolic translations. Some, for example, openly justify unnecessary translations on the grounds that they at least keep translators employed. As much as job creation is a very noble and necessary political objective, few serious professionals would like to see their goal in life as the mere maintenance of their employment. Far better, I suggest, to envisage future intermediaries doing more than just translation. Far bet-

ter, I believe, to train our students to do more than translate.

Fourth, much of the academic discipline of translation studies, institutionally based on a massive increase in translator-training programmes, is structured to exclude interlingual positions from its field, either by applying linguistics to texts or by looking at systems rather than translators. In so doing, translation studies remain a faithful reflection of translation itself by surreptitiously excluding the various communicative possibilities of nontranslation, notably the many modes and degrees of language learning. The notion of interlanguage, which revolutionized second-language acquisition theory, has scarcely progressed beyond the odd metaphor in translation theory.

Fifth, if one looks carefully at the development of translator-training programmes, a key moment appears in the 1950s, when French initiatives laid the foundation of European unity and French diplomacy sought importance on the world stage. Following the creation of the *Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs* in Paris in 1953, the two main French translator-training institutions were set up in Paris in 1957. Not wholly by chance, the French language dominated the first international network of institutions, the *Conférence Internationale des Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes* (CIUTI), which met informally from 1960 and has long brought together independent schools that are concerned almost exclusively with translation (as opposed to language teaching) and focus on the training of conference interpreters. From that moment on, I suggest, European translator training has vigorously rejected nontranslation and has been dominated by the figure of the invisible conference interpreter, providing magically instant cross-language communication in a Europe prepared to pay for such services. French political institutions, and more recently Germany, have

indeed been prepared to pay highly for maintenance of their linguistic status with respect to English. Hence their ideal of translation as a national rather than individual necessity. Hence, also, peculiar traits like the margination of liaison or community interpreting in translator-training programmes. This means the margination of situations where translators are very present, languages are never entirely separate, and the communication needs are painfully more human than symbolic.

Sixth, since the 1950s, whole classes of European intellectuals have been prepared to follow or adapt this initially French discourse, converting the defence of French into a defence of each and every language spoken in the entire territory of nation-states (bad luck, just quietly, any forlorn stateless languages). These are what Hobsbawm has called the «examination-passing classes», the social groups that get ahead by studying state languages rather than inheriting or producing material wealth, the people that institutionalized the idea of the national language. That could be us, you and me! We have every interest in promoting and defending state languages, official languages, the kind that governments get translated and thus must create jobs for. All the more so in central and eastern Europe, where the category of the nation was doggedly maintained by the cultural policies of real socialism and can still be manipulated as chimeric liberation. Who wouldn't want to defend an official national language? More work for us and our students! More social prestige! If only there were listeners or readers who really needed us all that much. If only we weren't committing some of our more critical brains to unseen reproductive tasks, as if there were nothing more important to be done.

Seventh, and finally, the maintenance of a largely illusory discourse on the need for translations is now entering a phase

where the institutional aims fall slightly out of kilter, for want of hard cash. As long as the political ideals hold firm, translation is free to wallow in the slough of Europe's subsidies, a perpetual *exception culturelle*. But when the economists start to calculate and 'real needs' sew up deep pockets, the believers in translation can only play on troubled consciences, repeating and repeating the multilingual ideals until someone pays them to shut up. At base, this *usage de toutes les langues* might be a desperate demand for funds.

I have nothing against ideals. It's just that the official discourses on translation are full of hollow ideals and impossible promises building up naïve expectations. I humbly suggest it would be far better, in this day and age, to accept a dose of realism and to build our Europe accordingly. Concretely, this would mean abandoning translation as a restricted field of inquiry, associating translator training with all the dimensions of language learning, and training people to make a long-term Europe work from within vastly expanded networks of interlingual spaces. More specifically, it would mean forgetting the implicit assumption that translation is always necessary.

The real question should not be how to translate but whether to translate. Answers to that question require more than translation studies.

My arguments will meet with objections. Let me address a handful:

Some might say I can't see beyond my nose, that I consider only the middle position, that I remain insensitive to the role of translation in the defence and development of Europe's minor languages. Reply: Yes, a fair enough criticism: defend and develop where you will, but please don't confuse nationalist aims with those of intercultural communication or integration; many Romantic ideals will have to be renounced.

Next: Democratic participation, say good politicians, requires that all citizens

have access to information in their own language. Reply: Yes indeed, all the laws and regulations to which people are subject must be accessible to them; they must indeed be translated where required. And I would go further in this regard: such texts should be translated into all the 40 or so languages of our Europe (depending on how you want to define 'Europe' and 'language'). Yet actual laws and regulations are not produced with overwhelming frequency; the translation they require need not extend to all the committee meetings, discussion papers, surveys and conferences by which they are produced. Not by chance are European lawmakers, the ones with the full panoply of information, increasingly working in interlingual spaces, using just one or two languages or interlanguages.

Perhaps more seriously: The mixing of languages, say millenarians, will lead either to a grey non-language of limited resources or to the hegemony of just one imperial language, the English of our day. Reply: The ability to speak and understand two or more languages is surely a source of cultural richness, opening a space of creative play and invention, necessarily beyond what Barthes termed the fascism of monolingual grammar. And we now have many Englishes. As for imperialism, yes, I regret the passing of medieval Latin, which depended on the Roman Empire just as little as European English depends on Hollywood, and did not, it seems, kill off too many vernaculars. More important, no *lingua franca* is all-purpose; it does not permeate our kitchens and bedrooms, our hearts and being, since intercultural communications are just as narrow and specialized as countless other domains. As for imperialist technology, it now allows internatio-

nal converse in all kinds of minor languages (the internet *encourages* the use of minor languages). The mixing of languages simply means that no one language can be truly all-purpose, and this need not be dangerous in itself.

Finally: Literary and philosophical texts, say a row of Schleiermachers, require full command of the rich complexities of a language; they must be translated, and translated fully and faithfully, so that transcendent value can be made available to all; a culture that does not translate the great foreign texts will close in on itself, offering less quality of life to its members, so they say. Reply: Thus do the examination-passing classes pretend to have sole access to universal values, manipulating great texts as a matter of national pride, seeking to control the knowledge and language of their dependents, producing subsidized translations so that monolingual receivers finish up *needing* subsidized translations. Where a foreign work or culture is the object of an initial or one-off demand, by all means translate, and do so as carefully as you can. If, however, what is at stake is a long-term relation with another language, then teach that language or send your students and children there, so that their quality of life will involve the ability to go out and discover value for themselves.

In sum, if you want integration beyond the nation, bring people into interlingual space; use initial translations to do so if and when necessary. But do not pretend to condemn Europe to eternal dependence on translations. And do not believe that the *usage de toutes les langues* is a promise that translation can or should fulfil, not for Catalan, not for Irish, not for Hungarian, not even for colloquial Australian.

Hand over Fist?

A response to Anthony Pym and Douglas Robinson

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Debates are possible on the assumption that the participants are not slaves to positionality (class, race, gender) and that we are not simply repeating preordained institutional scripts. If that was the case then an on-line translation colloquium would be void of meaning. It would appear to me, however, that in two different but related ways, Anthony Pym and Douglas Robinson may in fact foreclose the very debate that they want us to begin. Anthony Pym borrowing Hobsbawm's concept of the «examination-passing classes» suggests that translation theoreticians' defence of the role of translation in the maintenance of national language is dictated by pure self-interest, «Who wouldn't want a national language? More work for us and our students!». There is of course in all institutional strategy an element of self-promotion (a point strangely ignored by some of the less self-reflexive post-modern theorists) but a reductive notion of self-interest is a rhetorical procedure whose only outcome is silence. To deny the charge of professional egotism is to be brought before the Higher Court of the Unconscious where the more serious charge of Repression is leveled against the accused (of course you deny you are motivated by professional self-interest, one of the tricks of hegemony is to pretend it does not exist). The self-interest

claim can only invite assent as any other response is evidence of incurable bad faith.

Douglas Robinson's notion of the translator as channel has the potential for inducing another form of paralysis, ideological overdeterminedness, that is reminiscent of the metanarratives of system and structure in the 60s and 70s which promised liberation and delivered powerlessness. «Readers, editors, users, teachers gave us feedback; channeling that feedback, we were channeling ideology. Our 'helpers' channeled it to us; we channel it to others». If the «ideosomatics of language is the voice of social mastery internalized in the workings of our own bodies» and ideology works at microcosmic, electrochemical levels then the translator becomes the idle plaything of ideology. She becomes invisible once again. Currents of ideology pass through this diaphanous creature who once again finds herself subject to the mastery of Language, Law and Ideology. The Foucauldian thesis that power is everywhere can often lead to the sorry conclusion that resistance is nowhere (if only because as any progressive critic of nationalism will tell you the powerless reproduce the paradigms of the powerful). Thus, ideological critique which initially is powered by a radical, demystificatory, anti-hegemonic impetus can give way to

the fatalism of the panopticon where post-Kantian subjects in a parody of Stephen Dedalus struggle aimlessly to free themselves of the nets of Knowledge, Power and Discourse.

Robinson is of course right to underline the translator's ideological entanglements (though it would have been useful to have a definition of ideology in the piece, when I last looked at theories of ideology I found fifteen different definitions of ideology), a fact borne out by even the most cursory examination of translation history. However, it appears to me that the erasure of the subject can in fact be a deeply reactionary move and lead to a depoliticisation of the translation process. The feminist political scientist Nancy Hartsock once noted that the postmodern view that truth and knowledge are contingent and multiple is in itself a truth claim and more importantly that the claim undermines the ontological status of the subject at the very time when women and non-Western peoples have begun to claim themselves as subject. This is why Pym in my view is correct to stress the intercultural/interlingual space of the translator as the position occupied by the translation subject. Studying translation from the point of view of the agent, to use Daniel Simeoni's term, allows for the possibility of a certain epistemic unity in translation studies rather than what Simeoni sees as the endless fragmentation of an object-centred, positivistic notion of translation as science (Daniel Simeoni, «Translating and Studying Translation: The View from the Agent», *META* 40/3, 445-460). The eternal *sourcier/cibliste* debates tend to render the translator invisible though feminist theories have repeatedly stressed the «positionality» of the translator. A study of the translator using some of the conceptual tools of intercultural theories of communication, psychoanalysis and ethnopsychiatry could indeed be quite illuminating for a theory of translator as intercultural

agent. The interlingual space that the translator occupies is indeed based on lingual separateness but the interlingual can only exist if there are lingual differences otherwise it would be a *non-sens*. Translation does not create differences, it merely makes them explicit. Rather than seeing translation as the enemy of the interlingual, one can argue the opposite, that it is by looking at the social, psychological, cultural and linguistic difficulties faced by the translator that one can map out the complexity of that intercultural space and draw on the millennial experience of translators rather than translations in seeking to overcome the problems of intercultural communication. A proper analysis of this experience could indeed provide a useful basis for the study of interlingual spaces that Pym recommends for translator training schools in Europe.

One of the problems of intercultural communication is of course asymmetry. Anthony Pym may argue in his *META* article that 'hegemony, conflict, exploitation' do not infiltrate everything but in institutional arrangements they infiltrate a great deal. More specifically in his theory of translation as a transaction cost, the notion of 'mutual benefits' remains somewhat nebulous. English speakers typically see little mutual benefit in translation because they speak a world language. Any effort invested in translation is seen as wasteful (viz. *Sunday Times* critique of EU literary translation schemes) and is only grudgingly granted. The mutual benefits to non-dominant languages are much greater but they typically have less political power and therefore are less able to insist on the necessary social effort being made to ensure a mutually beneficial interaction. Abandoning translation could, rather than opening up interlingual spaces, lead to unchecked positive feedback where the cumulative benefits of monoglossia for the linguistically dominant lead to the

emptying out of the interlingual space. That the 'mutual benefits' for Europe's weaker languages would approximate to zero would be irrelevant as linguistic interaction would be seen as primarily driven by monolingual pragmatism. This latter would be seen as the basis of successful cooperation not the mutual benefits to weaker parties. The symbolic (in the full not the shambolic sense) value of languages has a cost that is disproportionately high for the powerful and is disproportionately important for the powerless. Costs reflect this asymmetry and are a necessary element in the maintenance of diversity (language learning is of course another one). One could of course argue that the problem with the EU is not that it is spending too much money on translation but that it spends too much money on the wrong kind of translation. Pym's contention that for proper appreciation of works of literature in other languages, students should go to the countries where the literature is produced and immerse themselves in the language and culture that produced the literature is eminently sensible. However, it becomes eminently impractical once the student has the temerity to read

widely in the literatures of several countries given the inordinate amount of time it takes to get properly acquainted with a language and culture. For this reason, it is unfortunate that so much of the EU budget goes on administrative translation when the real, long-term needs of the citizens of the EU are in the area of literary and cultural translation, an area that is at present woefully underfunded. Are translators master forgers? Is the rise in translation activity to do with a new faith in fakes? Spiritual mediums were notoriously associated with fraud in the nineteenth century and it would be interesting to speculate on the link between translation and forgery in this context — the medium and the ego-massage. Douglas Robinson does not mention Michel Serres, yet his work on the angelic tasks of annunciation and communication in *La légende des anges* can be usefully related to Robinson's own concerns with guiding hands and spiritual channels, particularly Serre's concept of the fallen angels, the messengers who loom larger than the message (the stars of the mass media). Are cyborg translators the new seraphs or the mutinous vanguard of translators who would be God?