

Translation Studies and Western Philosophy

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The various disciplines in the humanities are related by chains of authority. Sociolinguistics, for example, historically refers to linguistics and to sociology for the authority of its founding concepts, just as linguistics in turn might refer to philology, or sociology might look back to history, to psychology or to political economics. These chains allow concepts to be borrowed and thus constantly displaced. They also allow authority to be projected back onto the discipline referred to, such that authority itself is also constantly displaced across our disciplines.

This frame enables us to idealize Western philosophy as a set of discourses that do *not* ostensibly borrow authority from external disciplines. It is, if you will, a place where terms and concepts would be elaborated and refined for use in other disciplines; it might supremely act in the service of others. Of course, philosophical discourses more realistically form a place where the authority circulates internally, as philosophers read and re-read philosophers, schools and traditions are formed, at the same time as a mode of authority can flow inward from whatever discipline appears to be advancing the frontiers of knowledge.

Our general frame also enables us to hypothesize that Translation Studies as a client discipline, drawing on philosophical discourses, and indeed on many other intermediary disciplines as well.

The discourses of philosophy might thus be related to translation studies in at least three ways:

1. Philosophers of various kinds have used translation as a case study or metaphor for issues of more general application.
2. Translation theorists and practitioners have referred to philosophical discourses for support and authority for their ideas.
3. Philosophers, scholars and translators have commented on the translation of philosophical discourses.

Since authority would seem to flow more from philosophy to Translation Studies than the other way around, the political relations are very different in each of the above cases. Here we shall thus consider their evolutions independently, even though, in history, they operate side-by-side within the general epistemologies of the humanities.

1. Translation as an example for philosophy

Western philosophy has no traditional discourse on translation. Indeed, the term “translation” is absent from most of the specialized encyclopedias and glossaries. The concept plays virtually no role in Greek philosophical discourse (as remarked by Robinson 1992, 1997) and little would seem to have been done over the centuries to cover the lacuna. This more or less **active exclusion** might be attributed to a profound

ethnocentrism, to the attitude that regards all foreign languages as “barbarous” (from the Greek *barbaros*, foreign). The exclusion might be seen as running through Roman culture as well (the comments we have from Horace and Cicero concern dramatic poetry and oratory, not philosophy) and indeed through much of the medieval tradition. When Vermeer (1996), for example, takes the systems of a Ramon Llull or Thomas Aquinas and develops the translation theories those thinkers could have produced, the interpretative *tour de force* simply begs the question of why the medieval thinkers did *not* produce the translation theories. **Robinson** (1991, 1996) has attempted to trace the repression of translation from the days of Egyptian and Greek cultural transfers into Rome, then right through a repressive Christendom. Something similar can be found in **Meschonnic** (1999: 32-34) when he argues that Europe is the only continent whose culture was founded on translations (from Greek for its philosophy, Hebrew for its religion) and that it has constantly *concealed* those translative origins by treating translations as if they were originals. Berman (1984: 59, 1985: 88; citing Schlegel) made much the same critique of Islamic cultures in which originals were supposedly destroyed once the translation had been completed: translation is something to be hidden, not theorized. Hence, perhaps, the traditional silence of the philosophers.

Great care, however, must be taken when painting entire cultures with such a wide brush. There are at least two further reasons that might explain the reticence. First, for much of Western history, the production and dissemination of new ideas has been a politically dangerous activity; philosophers have not always been on the side of power. In some circumstances, it is convenient to present new texts as if they were translations from afar (i.e. as **pseudotranslations**), if only to protect the author. This might explain the suspiciously large numbers of philosophical translations for which no originals can be found, and not only in the Islamic tradition (see Badawi 1968). Second, the transmission of ideas for much of the Latin ages was dominated by a **theological hierarchy of languages**. At the top stood the languages of divine revelation (Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, Sanskrit for some), then the languages of enlightened mediation (notably Latin), and then the written vernaculars (English, French, German etc.), with the spoken *patois* remaining excluded from consideration. This very powerful idea underlay numerous translators’ discourses (humility tropes abound in the prefaces). It also informed numerous metaphors for translations as inferior products, given that the directionality was normally from prestigious to inferior languages. Since the hierarchy thus positioned translating itself as an inferiorizing activity, the result was not worthy of dignified discussion. Should we really lament the absence of any great traditional “philosophy of translation”? One might as well regret the historical lack of a “philosophy of furniture” (found in Poe but nowhere else).

Only once the vernaculars had been re-evaluated with respect to Latin was it possible to dignify the translator’s activity as an object of serious thought. This process started in fifteenth-century Renaissance humanism, where **Leonardo Bruni** successfully insisted on elegance in translations. The dignification of translation then rode of the back of the rising European nationalisms, based on the idea of strong all-purpose languages between which something like equivalence was conceivable, well before the term itself was used. This general mode of thought reached a significant degree of completion in **German Romanticism**.

Wilhelm von Humbolt (1836) viewed all languages as being worked in the same way, forming concepts into complementary world-views. This was a result of a sudden widening of the conceptual world, first through the enormous time scale of

geology (cf. Foucault 1966), second through the voyages of exploration. Humboldt was looking at languages like Quechua and Basque, beyond the established translation networks, and at cultures, like German, that were in evident processes of historical development. The result was not only an upward re-evaluation of cultural difference (*counter to* the medieval hierarchies), but also awareness of how translation could be used to refine and standardize developing target languages (*in keeping with* the hierarchies). This historical contradiction largely hid from view the logical possibility that, if languages had different worldviews, translation in any ideal sense must be impossible (this would be problematized by Walter Benjamin and twentieth-century linguistics).

In lieu of that problem, we find Humboldt, along with **Schleiermacher** and others, stressing the priorities of foreignizing (*verfremdend*) over domesticating (*verdeutschend*) translation. This meant requiring that a translation read like a translation, and not like just another target-language text. Would the result just be a jumble of translations? For **Schlegel**, protection from that extreme involved searching for conceptual lines between “strangeness” (*Fremdheit*) in a translation and what could be valued as “the foreign” (*das Fremde*) (Berman 1984:246-247; 1992:154). Such distinctions would theoretically allow translations to contribute to the development of German language and culture (for which some degree of ideal sameness was still required) at the same time as they marked translations as a separate kind of text, potentially apart from the truly national (others, notably **Levy**, would later pick up the idea of translations as a separate literary genre). Underlying this theorization was not an exclusive concern with translation but a series of ideas about the future development of a very particular national culture.

The legacy of the German Romantic complex can be traced along two lines. The first would depend on the fundamental **opposition to domesticating modes** of translation. If domestication is the norm of a dominant, prestigious culture, the Germanic insistence on foreignization can be idealized in ethical terms, as a mode of openness that welcomes rather than excludes the other. Translation theory thus becomes a way of talking about issues of cultural protectionism. The German Romantic dichotomy underlies **Ortega y Gasset**’s “Miseria y esplendor de la traducción” (1937), and the **ethics of foreignization** has been well suited to a number of intellectuals situated within dominant cultures, for whom it has offered limited expiation. In French it is recuperated in **Meschonnic**’s single-minded insistence on rendering the rhythm of the original (1973, 1999); it opened the way for **Antoine Berman**’s thorough critique of ethnocentric textual practices (1984). In English, the same mode of thought can be found in **Venuti**’s initial critique of “fluency” in translation (1995, 1998a). In all these contexts, the various debates concern the effects translations have on *target* languages and cultures.

The second legacy of the German Romantics would be the general **hermeneutic tradition** that runs across all these contexts. Here the focus of arguments is the nature of the *source* text or author that is translated. As soon as one sets up dichotomies of translation, one must recognize there is more than one way to translate. The status of the source text consequently becomes problematic. No text can give all the information necessary for its complete rendition; all texts are thus to some extent open to competing interpretations. The question then becomes how, and with what degree of confidence, one can presume to have understood that which is to be translated. That is a question at the root of phenomenology, running right Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Although the general problematic of translation is never far from the concerns of these thinkers, **Martin Heidegger** is the only one to have used translation as a mode of philosophical exposition and perhaps of thought. His particular interest in translation is not just in the plurality of interpretations, but in an ontology of language itself, in the very reasons why there are many languages, and more particularly in a curiously assumed relation of equality between German and classical Greek. In this, Heidegger, along with **Walter Benjamin**, drew on the fragmentary ideas of **Hölderlin**, a hitherto sidelined figure in German Romanticism (on the many relations between these figures, see Steiner 1975). The central idea for Benjamin is that the original expression contains a plurality meaning in its very form, in the same way as the Kabbalistic tradition construes meanings from the numbers represented by the characters of Hebrew script. To work on the original form, to bring out those hidden meanings, is the task of translation. In Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" (1923), this is expressed as the idea that each language is itself a fragment of a larger whole, and that the translator is actually piecing together the parts of a divine meaning, broken in the fall from grace. The practical application of this is nevertheless difficult to discern in Benjamin's fairly uneventful translation of Baudelaire, for which the famous essay was originally an introduction.

Chau (1984) summarize the hermeneutic approach in terms of a few basic tenets. Since there is no truly objective understanding of a text, no translation can represent its source fully and all translations cannot but change the meaning of the source text. Further, following **Gadamer**, "prejudices" are unavoidable and can be positive in all acts of interpretation. Chau claims that this general approach makes the translator at once humble and more responsible, taking part in the active creation of a translation rather than remaining a slave to illusions of necessary equivalence. Others might claim that the approach encourages the translator to transgress the ethics of fidelity or equivalence. Here, very clearly, the paths of the philosophers have diverged widely from the positivistic tenets of twentieth-century linguistic analysis.

As formulated, the hermeneutic approach reflects aspects of the twentieth-century loss of certainty. Indeed, its tenets reappear in many contemporary approaches, certainly in Derrida (who started as a reader of Husserl) but also, perhaps paradoxically, in the move to **Descriptive Translation Studies**, where positivistic conceptions of empirical science have nevertheless revealed the vast plurality of translatory practices. On both these fronts, cultural relativism and historicism have taken over from claims to correct or complete interpretations. All these various strands have rejected the view that there is only one way to render any given source element; all have sought to understand how and why a translation is under-determined by its source.

A genealogically different view of translation was initiated by the American analytical philosopher **Willard Quine** with the publication of his essay "Translation and Meaning" (1959). Quine was concerned with the general problem that the one set of data can be accounted for by more than one theory, and that there is no way to decide between the theories. The hermeneutic tradition ultimately sought ethical, ontological or eschatological ways of solving that problem. Quine, however, was from a conservative **analytical tradition** that sought a technical, logical answer, drawing on behaviourism and following a path that could only lead to scepticism. His use of translation is clearly as a thought experiment, an illustration of a general epistemological principle (nevertheless known as the 'indeterminacy of translation').

Quine posits a situation of "radical translation", where there has been no previous contact between the cultures concerned (he immediately admits that real life provides

no such situations). A rabbit runs past, the native exclaims “Gavagai!”, and the linguist notes this term as meaning “rabbit”, or “Lo, a rabbit!”, or “undetached rabbit-part”, or “There is a flea on the rabbit’s left ear”, and so on. Will subsequent investigation reveal the one true meaning of the term? Quine’s analysis locates degrees of certainty for various kinds of propositions, but concludes that there can be no absolute determination of the translation: the meaning of “Gavagai!” will never be translated with certainty.

Interestingly enough, Quine’s indeterminacy thesis was published in the same volume (Brower 1959) as **Roman Jakobson’s** statement that “the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign” (1959: 232). This might also be called the **principle of semiosis**, of meaning itself as a constant process of interpretation or translation. The idea can be traced back to the American thinker **Peirce**, sometimes regarded as the founder of semiotic approaches to translation (see Gorrée 1994). Taken as such, the principle of semiosis should mean that translations do not transfer or reproduce meaning but are actively creating meanings. From the very beginning, this idea was present within the very discourse of those (including Peirce and Jakobson) whose prime search was for certainty, for a sure grounding of thought. At the time, however, the principle of semiosis was regarded as dissipation rather than liberation.

An intriguing though largely forgotten snapshot of the associated **analytical approaches** is the volume *Meaning and Translation*, edited by Guenther and Guenther-Reutter in 1978. Here we find a general assumption that the problems of translation are those of formal semantics, to be cured by heavy doses of propositional logic. The debates concern the extent to which social or contextual factors need be taken into consideration, whether meaning is in one’s head or in social use, and the exact nature of **translatability** (a problem that was found but never solved by the tradition of the German Romantics). We find, for example, translation involved in **Katz’s principle of effability**, which says that each proposition can be expressed by some sentence in any natural language (similar propositions can be found in Frege, Tarski and Searle). Katz (1978: 209-216) recognizes the principle to be basically true but subject to “performance limitations”, notably the length of the resulting sentences. Since all real-world translations are subject to such limitations, Katz effectively moves the problem of translatability into the social or pragmatic domain, away from the concerns of philosophical semantics at that stage.

An associated area dealt with in the *Translation and Meaning* volume is the analysis of translational discourse as a mode of reported speech. **Bigelow** (1973) recognizes that translators are doing something in between reported speech (“The author said ‘Ich bin müde’”) and indirect speech (“The author said he was tired”). A translational mid-point (“The author said ‘I am tired’”) can be named as a partly Fregean hyperintensional operator, present in the proposition that “X translates as Y”. This is a fine analysis of the discursive form of ideal equivalence. At that point, however, the philosopher can go no further without recognizing the intervention of historical subjectivities (a translator *chooses* to render X as Y). Historical subjectivity was once again considered beyond the analytical philosophers’ remit.

Something similar happens with **W. D. Hart’s** (1970) little-remarked observation that translators cannot simultaneously preserve self-reference, truth-value and reference. This means that the sentence “The first word of this very sentence has three letters” cannot be rendered word-for-word into French (where the first word would have two letters) without becoming untrue. There are several strategies for solving the problem (to refer to the English sentence, or to talk about two letters instead of three).

Burge (1978) usefully sees this paradox as important for the **rendering of dialogue**, where the reader is not sure of what language is being referred to and truth-value cannot be maintained. For the formalist, however, the neatness of the analysis once again dissolves into questions of context and choice, together with the awareness that actual translation solutions are often between the alternatives mapped out in theory. Interestingly enough, the French thinker **Maurice Blanchot** (1949) had pointed out the half-way status of Hemingway's characters who, by speaking Spanish in English—inserting the occasional Spanish term and adopting Spanish syntax—created a 'shadow of distance' that could then be translated as such. For Blanchot, this meant that the text, prior to translation, was in more than one language, working an internal distance that obviously escaped the vision of formal semantics. But that was a Europe, a different world, lying in wait of Derrida.

The analytical philosophers were doing eminently useful philosophical work. They were taking very real problems, defining them in neat terms, and formulating some possible solutions. They could have been of real service to mainstream translation research. Unfortunately, with some exceptions (see Malmkjaer 1998: 9), their formulations have had minimal authority in translation theory, much to the detriment of the field. Why?

First, there has been little ongoing tradition within analytical philosophy itself, where translation has remained no more than an interesting test case. The fundamental debate raised by **Quine** has occasionally been picked up (cf. Kirk 1986, Føllesdal 2001) and has had applications in anthropological research (Feleppa 1998), but, as a general epistemological principle, it has generally failed to transcend positions such as **Chomsky's** pronouncement that the indeterminacy of translation is "true and uninteresting" (1980: 15). As **Katz** put it, if two translators give different renditions of the same sentence, and both renditions are equally acceptable, then they may disagree personally but there is strictly nothing for them to argue about. In the parlance of the day, there is no "fact of the matter".

Second, although the search for certainty could formulate precise problems, it could not offer any authoritative solutions. This kind of philosophy marked itself off as an ultimately regional field of inquiry, of service at some points but not willing to enter the world of action. There has been a more radical engagement with uncertainty, notably in the work of **Donald Davidson**, and this might be in tune with general trends away from ontological assumptions. Davidson refers to translation explicitly when defending the thesis that the attribution of a truth-value to another's utterance is inseparable from the assumed translatability of that utterance. If we believe the native's "Gagavai!" has a referential (extensive) meaning, then we must assume that it is translatable into our language (Davidson 1984: 194-5). This would effectively enlist translation in an argument against radical cultural relativism. However, in raising the philosophical stakes to the highest level, Davidson does little to prove any degree of actual translatability, nor does he offer much direction to anyone seeking to investigate actual translations.

Third, and more fatally, a vitriolic debate took place between **John Searle** and **Jacques Derrida**, mainly between 1983 and 1988 (see Derrida 1988). Searle defended the existence of **literal meaning**, in the line of the kind of necessary beliefs that Davidson was working on; Derrida was arguing against any such stable ground for meaning, in the line of the critique of "transcendental signifieds" that he had been denouncing in French since the late 1960s. Although this debate did not concern translation as such, it did turn on problems of shared or non-shared cultural conventions, most immediately about how one should behave in academic debates.

The result was only superficially a dividing line between English-language and French philosophy (the former still nostalgic for certainty; the latter seeing any such beliefs as reactionary). It also became, in the English-speaking academy, a dividing line between linguistic and literary approaches to problems of alterity. Since that debate, many literary scholars have felt they no longer needed to read anything from the analytical tradition, as if the latter had simply all got it wrong. And remarkably few analytical philosophers make any reference to Derrida, as if he were only for lunatic fringes. Although the debate did not concern translation, its divisions have had profound effects on the authority of philosophical discourse in translation theory, as we shall see below.

Prior to his American debate, **Derrida** had had remarkably little to say about translation. In his most influential early work, *De la grammatologie* (1967), his approach was presented as a critique of traditional separations of form and meaning. Saussure, for example, could only formulate the two-part sign (signifier and signified) by excluding from his science the difference between spoken and written signifiers. For Derrida, the illusion of stable meaning can only come from such exclusions. The work of active thought (in this case, of grammatology, the science of the excluded writing) must be to restore those suppressed differences, and to make them work against stability. This was a critique eminently suited to the spirit of May 1968, albeit without expressed political allegiance. To anyone reading that work from the perspective of translation theory, the critique was also a theory of **semiosis**, of meaning as a constant process of interpretation and re-interpretation (Peirce's theory of the interpretant is cited). In a word, it was a generalized theory of translation, not as a process conveying meaning but as constantly creating it.

We will pick up the later Derrida in the next two sections. Here, though, two aspects should be noted. First, to our knowledge, Derrida has never formulated that generalized theory of translation as such. He certainly mentions the issue in an early commentary on non-equivalence (1968) and in a much-cited reading of Walter Benjamin (1985). Indeed, in that same reading he dismisses Jakobson because of a few absolute categories but he does little to integrate the notion of semiosis. Second, Derrida's actual commentaries on translations are more conservative and constructive than are those of the many translation theorists who would take their lead from him.

To understand why this might be so, we must try to see how the authority of philosophy has fared in the more precarious spheres of a fledgling intellectual discipline.

2. Philosophy as authority for the theorization of translation

The theorization of translation, whether by translators or academics, has leant on philosophical discourses far more than philosophers have seriously considered translation. In this highly asymmetric relationship, difficult texts fall into the hands of readers from more generalist spheres. One suspects that the philosophers would not always identify with what has been done in their name.

The **authority function** is of long standing. **Jerome**, for example, has long been cited as an authority for fidelity to both form and sense, since he actually condoned both modes of translating (one for sacred texts, the other for the rest). More famous is the case of **Horace**, whose "nec verbo verbum" has repeatedly been used as an authoritative pronouncement both *for* literalism and (correctly, we believe) against it, down to quite recent dates (see García Yebra 1994: 48-64). What is perhaps more surprising is the extent to which the theorization of translation has elevated such

figures (a theologian-translator, a poet) to philosopher-like authority, speaking with the wisdom of a distant past. One might attribute such levitation to the relative silence of properly philosophical discourses. Yet something similar still happens with figures like Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Nietzsche, Benjamin or Sartre, who would certainly qualify as thinkers, theologians, translators and writers, but not always as philosophers in any professional sense. That is a status sometimes thrust upon them. In so doing, those who theorize translation too easily assume the consensus and possible coherence of philosophy. In many cases the authority has been created and projected by the translation theorists themselves.

A consequence of this “boomerang” authority function is the common enough practice of stringing together names that appear to be on one’s side. Thinkers of various shades are cited because of the prestige they enjoy in the circles in which translation is being discussed. For instance, we find the American theorist **Lawrence Venuti** borrowing frames from the French Marxist Louis Althusser in 1986, revindicating Schleiermacher (as resistance to capitalism) in 1991, bowing to Derrida and De Man in 1992, being Nietzschean in 1995, working from Benjamin and Blanchot in 1995, then, in 1998, citing **Lecerle**’s arguments that linguistics always leaves an untheorized “**remainder**”, a part of language that is not systematized, an idea that Venuti attaches to **Deleuze and Guattari**’s arguments for “minority cultures”, ideally created through translations that exploit linguistic remainders (cf. Venuti 1998a, 1998b). Those references stimulate discussion on translation. Sometimes, however, they fare badly in the trip from philosophy, becoming falsely new and occasionally falling wide of the mark. The idea of the remainder, for example, can be found in earlier Marxist thinkers like Lefebvre (1968: 24-45) or Pêcheux (1975: 20-82); as a critique of linguistics it completely misses whole developments like the sociolinguistics of variation (since Labov) or descriptive text linguistics (since van Dijk). Nor are the sweeping critiques strictly necessary: Venuti’s greater virtues lie in bringing political and social contexts to literary translation in English, and in his close relation with both the practice and the practitioners. Although his earlier texts can be read as an intellectual defence of foreignizing translation strategies, broadly in the hermeneutic tradition, his translation practice has also espoused “fluent translating” when suited to the particular project (Venuti trans. 2000; xvii). One should thus perhaps not look for doctrinal philosophical thought but for a constantly engaged translatorial practice. Nevertheless, the philosophical references give weight and good tone when read by people distant from European traditions, especially those already adverse to positivist linguistics (following the Searle-Derrida debate, if not for other reasons). Venuti the translator has thus managed to develop his own thought while simultaneously manipulating the prestige of the foreign. Note that this particular prestige function is enhanced by the distance of the source: by citing French and German names, reducing them to a few lines or paragraphs, Venuti can at once simplify their contribution and become their privileged interpreter, channeling their authority.

The translation theorist as privileged reader of philosophy is by no means limited to the American literary academy. In France, **Antoine Berman** developed arguments in favour of foreignization by drawing out the ideas of selected German Romantics, unabashedly elevating Humboldt and Schleiermacher to the status of philosophers, and passing in silence marginal German thinkers like Hegel (cf. Pym 1997). He could thus construe “foreignizing” as a clearly Germanic tradition, to be opposed to French tradition of the *belles infidèles*, leaving himself as the privileged point of contact. Berman was nevertheless able to turn his readings into a radical and stimulating

project for an ethics of translation, based on the defence of otherness and the critique of ethnocentric textual practices. In the terminological and conceptual rigour of his project, one sees the imprint of Berman's academic training in philosophy. This is a tradition that also bears fruits in work by **Jean-René Ladmiral** (1979)--where meticulous attention is paid to the paradoxes of translation and its teaching--and **Alexis Nouss**'s work on cultural *métissage* (2001), which might be regarded as developing Berman's ethical project beyond the confines of translation.

Other cross-cultural references are not quite so open. **Alfred Hirsch**'s editing of the collective volume *Übersetzung und Dekonstruktion* (1997) opens with a translation of an early essay by Derrida (using the concept of translation to conceptualize the role of philosophy within the academy). However, "deconstruction" then turns out to be more or less everything that can be borrowed from Walter Benjamin (the points of contact are explicit in Hirsch 1995), such that French thought on translation is actually shown to be German, and to have been so for quite some time. In this case the authority of foreign philosophical thought turns out to be a reminder of a "forgotten code", something good that one had at home all along. The authority of philosophy thus creates privileged readers and, through them, strangely coherent opposing traditions in the theorizing of translation. Further translation theorists then tend to follow one tradition and simply not see the other. For example, a fine theoretical article on the non-binary options involved in translating dialogue (Lane-Mercer 1997) refers to a whole French-American literary tradition simply by naming Berman and Venuti. However, the text makes no mention of how the same problems were dealt with in the Quinean tradition.

Something similar can be found in German in the development of **translational action theory** (from Holz-Mänttärri 1984) and functionalist *Skopostheorie* (from Reiss and Vermeer 1984). **Holz-Mänttärri** borrows initial general perspectives from the action theory of **von Wright** (1968), adding insights from both extensions of the action and functionalist social anthropology (citations from Humboldt and Malinowski). The basic idea for **Vermeer**, on the other hand, is that translating is an action carried out in order to achieve a purpose (*Skopos*). This purpose is highly variable (it may or may not involve equivalence to a source) and is negotiated with any number of social actors. Holz-Mänttärri stresses the complexity of these negotiations, the translator's social role as an expert, and the many modes of translational action (since her translators do far more than translate). Vermeer would give more weight to the client's commission and to the conceptual priorities involved. Despite their fairly complex terminological webs, both might claim to have "dethroned the source text" (Vermeer 1989), revealing that there are numerous other determinants on what translators do. Within German-language research, this has been enough to form a close-knit group of self-citing theorists, weaving the image of a theoretical revolution, an epistemological break with a millennial past of fidelities and equivalencies. The ideas of action theory, however, were by no means the exclusive preserve of this general translation theory. The notion of purpose-based action has had a philosophical language since Kant and is common enough in any sociological approach. It could lead to a focus on purposes, competencies and expertise theory, as it has done in German, but it also has several feet in linguistic pragmatics, deontics, system theory and new methodologies of empirical observation. These latter aspects have been better developed beyond *Skopostheorie*, yet in ways that remain in fundamental agreement with its founding principles.

One should not be surprised, then, when a more cognitive kind of action theory, coming from the pragmatics of **Watzlawick** et al. (1967) or even the ethics of **Varela**,

appears in alternative theorizations of translational action. For example, **Monacelli and Punzo** (2001) start from the paradoxes like the fact that a translation is at once equivalent and non-equivalent to its source, depending on the momentary perspective of the observer. Such relations can be mapped by **fuzzy logic** (cf. also Grant 1999). What might be surprising, though, is that the origins of action theory, whatever its social, mathematical or psychological extensions, lie in analytical philosophy, in the tradition of Wittgenstein and Quine. That, at least, is where one must place the pioneering work of von Wright and Watzlawick et al.

So would the interest in action theory represent a late awakening to analytical philosophy? It seems more the case that the translation theorists concerned were turning to fragments of philosophical discourses not in order to legitimize any systematic analytical approach, but as part of an attempt to solve isolated and often long-standing problems. **Andrew Chesterman** (1993) for example, cites the pragmatic branch of philosophical inquiry, again referring to von Wright, in order to define the notions of “norms” and their implications for ethics. Yet Chesterman (1997) also borrows from **Karl Popper** on several occasions either to clarify concepts (as with the notion of “three worlds”) or to adapt specific ideas. In the field of ethics, for example, Popper observed that people agree more on what is bad than on what is good. Chesterman thus proposes that translation should have a similarly “negative ethics”, based on avoiding misunderstandings rather than on any ideal of complete equivalence.

Another use of philosophical discourse as a problem-solving tool would be **Arnaud Laygues**' readings of Buber, Marcel and Levinas (Laygues 2001), none of whom discussed translation at length, but all of whom developed ideas that can help translators think about their human relations. When **Martin Buber**, for instance, regards I-you discourse as ethically more authentic than third-person discourse, Laygues proposes that the ethical translator should regard both text and reader as second persons, not as objects. When **Emmanuel Levinas** regards the other (the person who is non-I) as a face to which we have certain ethical obligations, Laygues proposes that the translator seek an adequate ethical relation with the other (text, author, reader) and only then be concerned with the deontology of professional action. In a similar vein, **Melby** (1995) has attempted to apply Levinas's insights on otherness to the general field of language technology. In all these cases, philosophical discourse is used as a source of stimulating analogies or necessary terminological precision, but not as a ready-made solution to all the problems of Translation Studies.

Thanks to such borrowings, the translation theories of the 1990s were increasingly concerned with **ethical issues**. This was partly in reaction against traditional concepts like fidelity and equivalence, which twentieth-century uncertainty had left without any conceptual grounding. Yet it was also a response to the empiricism that had motivated many parts of Translation Studies in the 1980s. **Equivalence**, for example, had become a fact of all translations for Descriptive Translation Studies (cf. Toury 1980), dissolving the concept to the extent that it could no longer state what translators should do; the scholar's task was merely to describe its variants, norms and possible laws. At the same time, equivalence had become no more than a restricted “special case” for *Skopostheorie*, which sought to provide translators with alternative professional guidelines (cf. Pym 1995). For what were becoming deconstructionist or postmodern approaches, however, notions like equivalence and fidelity were traditional essentialist illusions, unable to provide any guidelines at all. **Barbara Johnson** (1985) proposed “taking fidelity philosophically”, as might a cheated spouse. That loss of faith left a gap, allowing for a return to fundamental ethical issues

this time based on the texture of human relationships rather than any empiricism of performance. Not gratuitously, this return to ethics has accompanied greater attention to dialogue interpreting, where more importance is intuitively given to people rather than texts (cf. Pym ed. 2001).

If there is a particular way of using philosophical discourse at this level, it is frequently not for isolated problem-solving. Some theorists take a whole system on board, seeking its ethical consequences in a more global sense. Here one might return to **Walter Benjamin** (1923) reflecting on his translations of Baudelaire through the worldview of Kabbalistic tradition (see Steiner 1975). A more frequent point of departure is **Jacques Derrida**, whose texts since the late 1980s frequently work on and with translations. This later Derrida seems very aware of his work not only being translated into American English, but also being interpreted within American departments of Literay and Cultural Studies. He plays with this translational relationship, revamping Benjamin, writing for and to his American translators, and reading translations of literary texts, notably Shakespeare.

Derrida's main translational interest in this period is **the plurality of the (apparent) source**. The oft-cited phrase "plus d'une langue" expresses this plurality: it could be translated as "more than one language" or as "let us have no more of one language", and both readings are in the source. Derrida, however, does not seek to "dethrone the source text", as Vermeer has claimed to have done and as many deconstructionists have believed. In a 1992 text we find him asking how it is possible that a work like *Romeo and Juliet* could make sense--any kind of sense--well beyond its original historical and cultural location. This apparent mode of translatability is called "**iterability**", attributed not to anything semantic but to the literary institutionalization of certain meaning effects (cf. Davis 2001: 30-35). In this, Derrida necessarily recognizes that literature is a system operating with ideals *other* than the constant process of deconstruction--this had been recognized much earlier (Derrida 1967: 229)--, as indeed might be operative ethical concepts like justice (Derrida 1993: 147). The source text may thus be seen not as a set of obligatory orders, nor as an entirely annulled monarch, but as a phantom, an image that organizes without determining the range of translational variants. It returns, like the ghost of King Hamlet (1993: 42-43). Derrida takes care to distinguish this from a claim to **translatability**, the sameness of which would make strict alterity impossible and must thus necessarily be broken. He nevertheless implicitly pays homage to the great literary text, moreover situating himself in a reading position to grasp all translational variants, to judge French translations of Shakespeare, and to legitimate their pertinence to the source. That is, Derrida not only recognizes the essentialist roles played by literary concepts, he plays the same humanist game himself.

Other deconstructionists, we have noted, have tended to be far more radical and sweeping in their theorizing of translation. The Brazilian theorist **Rosemary Arrojo** has perhaps led the critique of translation as "meaning transfer", as the enactment of necessary equivalencies, or indeed of any assumption of positional stability. We thus find her enlisting deconstruction and fellow travellers (psychoanalysis, postmodernity) not just against all assumptions of meaning transfer as such (1993) but also against many feminist approaches to translation (1994), against ideal symmetrical relations (1997) and indeed against all forms of linguistic essentialism (1996). Similar negativity can be found in **Kaisa Koskinen** (2000), who ostensibly works from Derrida and Bauman in order to assess the ethics of the translation theorists Venuti and Pym. Her postmodern eschewal of any position that would seek to guide the individual's responsibility for their own actions forces her to reject not just idealist

political causes but also searches for a professional subjectivity, rejected as a “neo-tribalism” (Koskinen 2000: 78). Such critiques allow little response, none the least because theorists like Venuti and Pym tend to write at practical levels where notions like “professionalism” are simply assumed: they are embodied in social entities like professional associations. At those more applied levels of discourse, as in much of feminism or Marxism, the philosophical authority of postmodern ethics is not immediately recognized. There are often more pressing problems to solve.

At the opposite end of such conceptual conflicts, some translation theories have managed to flourish without reference to any philosophical authority at all. The *théorie du sens* developed by **Danica Seleskovich** in Paris claims that one translates “sense”, not words. The exact nature of this “sense”, however, remains virtually untheorized. One finds a few early references to the French psychologist Piaget, but beyond that, a whole school of theorists and pedagogues has been based on the simple practical certitude that fragments of language make “sense”, and that “sense” can thus be translated. This “sense” might have been the “literal meaning” defended by Searle; it might even be a necessary assumption of Gricean conversation, or of Davidson’s truth-values. However, in the Parisian theory it requires no more than institutional justification: “sense” is an idea that works for the training of translators, and no more need be said. The result is that when polemicists from this school (perhaps Sergio Viaggio and Mariano García-Landa) seek philosophical debate on the issue, they are left with scarcely a leg to stand on. Their position was undermined by Quinean skepticism several generations ago; the division between sense and form was rubbed out by deconstruction; the terms of reference no longer find any philosophical frame.

Any advance in translation theory perhaps depends on greater awareness that most of the traditional arguments are now non-arguments. The strategies of minor power nevertheless lead the other way. Most schools or would-be schools of translation theory have needed to build a *Feindbild*, an image of the enemy. For Seleskovich and her followers, the enemy was anyone who said one should translate words, not sense (did any contemporary really believe that?). For *Skopostheorie*, the enemy was anyone who believed in equivalence as the only necessary goal of a translation (but surely it depends how they defined “translation”?). For Descriptive Translation Studies, it was anyone who tried to tell translators how to translate, since that was prescriptivism (but can descriptions be entirely neutral?). For deconstructionists, it was anyone who believed in translation as “meaning transfer” (but did anyone ever pretend you could pick up a meaning?).

Most of those enemies are actually quite difficult to find in translation theory, at least in the simplistic terms in which they have been attacked. And none of those binary oppositions is tenable in terms of contemporary philosophical discourse. It is for this reason, we suggest, that few philosophers would entirely identify with everything that translation theorists have done in their name.

4. Translating philosophy

The early **Derrida** claimed that “with the problem of translation, we are dealing with nothing less than the problem of the passage to philosophy” (1968: 9). His immediate concern in that text was a translation of Plato, where the Greek term *pharmakon* could be rendered in French as either *remède* (cure) or *poison* (poison), but not both terms at the same time. The translation problem was thus one of respecting the particular terminology of philosophical discourse, or at least of the philosophy that shares its terms with other discourse genres. In noting the inadequacy of the existing

translations in French, Derrida might be said to have achieved a more effective translation himself, albeit exceeding certain performance limitations. He did so because, obviously, a philosopher who uses a vernacular has a special interest in the translation of philosophy. Translation becomes a condition of their own iterability; it places their legacy in foreign hands (cf. for the anxieties of Nietzsche on the subject, Pym 1998). After centuries of neglect under a hierarchy of languages, translation might even become too important to be left to mere translation theorists.

The translation of philosophy (Plato will serve as our example) has been a concern of Western philosophy ever since the relation with the classical past became problematic. In fifteenth-century Renaissance humanism, **Leonardo Bruni** insisted on elegance as a necessary feature of Plato translations, engaging in a watershed debate with the Spanish bishop **Alonso de Cartagena**, who defended a Medieval translationese that was difficult to read, full of calques, and rarely mistakable as anything from the target culture. In that debate, Cartagena might be seen as defending foreignness, technical terms and linguistic plurality, in a way that many postmodernists would approve of. He was also arguing for translations that would keep pagan philosophy indelibly marked as being different from Christian doctrine. Unfortunately, that debate was historically won by Bruni. Plato found a translational voice as a stylist, a person; philosophy used the same words as other genres; pagan thought mixed with Judeo-Christian theology; discourse flowed from Greek to Latin to the vernaculars of Europe; Derrida's problem with *pharmakon* thus became thinkable.

That humanist tradition of translating philosophy is really what Derrida is playing with and against. It remained largely unchallenged until philosophy became at once secular and theological. The Protestant theologian **Schleiermacher**, for example, could pretend to be ideologically untroubled about translating Plato as a pagan; he was more concerned with philological otherness of the text. The thought of German Romanticism was on the level of form, language, identity, not of content as such. Schleiermacher's Plato was thus anything but elegant, with so many translator's notes that Ortega y Gasset, while largely agreeing with the foreignizing strategy, took time out to decry it as "ugly".

An anti-personalist strand of German Romanticism can be followed through much of the hermeneutic tradition. No one more than **Martin Heidegger** used translation to illustrate the tortuous paths of interpretation, using translation as a mode of philosophical exposition and perhaps of thought. This can be seen in his polemical retranslations of German philosophical terms from pre-Socratic Greek, in his constant reflections on the differences between languages, and in his insistence that translation (*Übersetzung*) is not just interpretation but also a handing-down, a question of legacy (*Überlieferung*), as key concepts draw on what was hidden in a prestigious anteriority (1963: 395-396). Translation becomes a way of actually doing philosophy, as carrying on a lost tradition. In this, we find a possible inspiration for Derrida's concern with a term like *pharmakon*, if not for the respect paid to iterability and the ghostly presence of the past. We might also divine the reason why these philosophers seem to prefer their own translations to anything produced by mere translators: Western philosophy, at a certain level, has become a series of conceptual translations of itself.

One might equally say that many contemporary philosophical discourses share an intimate concern about their own language being translational on some level. The result is commonly a heterogeneous text, which tends to become less so in translation (cf., on English translations of Wittgenstein and Plato, Venuti 1998a: 106-119). One of the possible laws of all translation is that it tends to homogenize discourse.

However, in the case of philosophy this may now be less so, since the authors speak with authority within the humanities: the American Derrida, for example, cannot be confused with the language of American philosophy. Indeed, translators and translation theorists tend to respect the philosophers far more than any philosopher ever had kind words to say about a translator.

5. Future orientations: The limits of philosophy

The main problems in the relations between philosophy and translation should by now be fairly evident. Where philosophical authority is present, many translation theorists are needlessly partisan. And where it is absent, a rather quaint empiricism reigns, as in much of Descriptive Translation Studies, or in corpus linguistics, or think-aloud protocols, which rarely transcend positivist notions of science. The continental divisions of philosophical discourse itself have served us poorly in this respect. Half the world pretends to know immediately what is wrong with the other half. The result is not just a lack of dialogue, but serious misunderstandings.

Some of the most unfortunate errors concern the status of linguistic inquiry. For instance, it is not uncommon to find the more literary theorists (cf. Venuti 1998a: 21-24) railing against something like **Grice's** maxims for conversation (do not tell lies, do not speak for too long, be relevant, etc.), since such things are culturally variable. And we can find quite a few normative articles where the same maxims are used to judge how well translators have performed, as if the maxims were laws for good texts. But both the theorists and the prescriptivists ignore or downplay the fact that Grice sees pragmatic meaning being produced by the *breaking* of these maxims. Not to see this is a serious loss. Within the analytical tradition, Grice is no doubt seeking something like semantic certitude, but what he has found is that people create meaning by breaking rules. So the rules are not laws; they are operative fictions that we use in order to communicate; and the breaking can lead to any number of nuances and ironies. This might provide a clue for the future status of the things people say and believe about translation.

One of the few theorists who have referred to both the analytical tradition and the hermeneutic-deconstructive complex is **Andrew Benjamin**, whose labyrinthine 1989 book *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy* has had remarkably little impact on the field. Like many others, Benjamin realizes there is no philosophical grounding for translation as "rational recovery" (the use of reason to recover the meanings of the source). Like many literary scholars he believes that, instead of semantics and the search for certainty, "the emphasis must shift to the text itself and a concern with language" (1989: 86). Yet Benjamin goes a little further, attempting to formulate what it is in language that is to be translated, or created in translation, and he does so in interactional terms: "In the beginning was the site of conflict" (108). So it is that site that is extended in translation.

That kind of reasoning might show a way forward, especially if conflict can be reconceptualized as neo-classical cooperation. The important point is that we move beyond the facile critiques of illusions. The sites of conflict (or cooperation) become places where ideas like fidelity, equivalence, translatability, invisibility or professional ethics have functional organizing roles (cf. on equivalence, Pym 1995; on translatability, Pym and Turk 1998; or on "presumed sameness", Gutt 1991, although Gutt's restrictive definition of "direct translation" does lead to unnecessary normative consequences). Those roles can indeed be grasped in terms of the analytical

tradition. This kind of non-believing return might even be postmodern, as if the terms mattered.

One remaining problem is the role and responsibility of the individual translator. **Ammann** (1994), citing the authority of existentialism, claims that Translation Studies has consistently tried to exclude the individual by developing categories of equivalence or binary dichotomies. That is true enough. We might go further: if any science is of the general, any scientific kind of Translation Studies must exclude the purely individual. So is our only option then to use philosophy to denounce the impositions of theory, and thereby liberate or empower the individual by pretending that they make their own decisions? That position would seem to stymie our desire to recognize operational fictions.

There are several possible solutions here. One of them, argued by **Chesterman** (1999), is to claim that Translation Studies need not directly tell translators what to do; it can carry out empirical scientific research in order to predict what is likely to happen if translators adopt option A, B or C in a given situation. This carries empiricism to a logical consequence, without necessarily assuming that the theorist's terms of analysis are ideologically neutral or devoid of borrowed authority.

Another possible solution is to use sociological discourse to conceptualize modes of individuality that are constantly conditioned by social relations, without being reduced to them. Here we might pick up the concept of “**habitus**” formulated by **Bourdieu** (cf. Simeoni 1998) and attempt to make it compatible with the notion of translation norms developed by Toury (1995). This, however, is merely to name a “site of conflict” within the object of study, without actually solving the conflict and without relating it to the position of the theorist.

At the same time, one might similarly follow Bourdieu in accepting that the human sciences are not simply of “the general”; they are based on social relations in which both theorists and practitioners participate, often within the same person. There would thus be considerable individuality involved, with philosophical authority ultimately giving way to sociological reflection on our own positions and interests. Translation theorists, as mediators between philosophical discourses and translational practices, are actively involved in a constant dialogue, in which we must learn from both sides. Seen in this light, the problem of Translation Studies is probably not that it has to read more philosophy, but that it should pay more dialectic attention to what *translators* do and say. A guideline for this might run as follows:

Translating can be seen as a problem-solving activity in which a source element may be rendered by one or more elements in the target language. If translators only have one available option, there is no more to be said; no philosophy is needed. When, however, they have two or three options, translation is worth talking about, ideally between translators, who thus start theorizing. And when, as occasionally occurs, there are numerous options available and no clear theory about how to reduce that complexity, the cause for discussion reaches levels where philosophical discourse may be turned to, for ideas about the options, although rarely for the translational solutions. This can be seen in most of the theories and approaches we have dealt with here: philosophical discourses tend to be appealed to, or intervene, with respect to problems where more than three or four alternatives are available. To develop words appropriate to those alternatives might be the role of philosophy such as we have seen it; to adapt and propose them might be one of the roles of Translation Studies.

What the philosophical discourses thereby miss, of course, are the logics of the more everyday activities, the many techniques by which translators themselves constantly reduce complexity. Those are the operational fictions that we need to

grasp. And to do so, we should perhaps learn to think more bottom-up, from the actual practices, rather than top-down, from the great conceptual systems, if ever the ends are to meet.

Further reading

Some of the key texts have been reprinted in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (2000), although the chronological chapter divisions there are occasionally misleading (Translation Studies has not followed a planetary straight line) and in some cases unfair (Descriptive Translation Studies, for example, cannot be locked into the 1970s). On the contribution of analytical philosophy, minimized in Venuti's reader, the best springboard is perhaps Kirsten Malmkjaer's article in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. Kathleen Davis's *Deconstruction and Translation* (2001) is an accessible and stimulating account of its subject, even if the editor never quite understood the last chapter. Much still-pertinent material from the same camp can be found in *Difference in Translation*, edited by Joseph F. Graham (1985). Some mileage may be had from George Steiner's *After Babel* (1975), although the willful mixing of Benjamin with Heidegger now seems a forged tradition. Steiner might well represent the dangers of reading too much theory: one starts to see translation everywhere, with enormous repetition of ideas. Far better, perhaps, to read just a few key philosophers, then indulge in a lot of observation, practice and thought about the problems of cross-cultural communication.

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