

## Exploring Translation Theories

Notes for translators and other careful readers

The following are questions (in blue) by the translators into Japanese, with the answers in red.

### Preface

This is a course on the main paradigms of Western translation theories since the 1960s.

Can I translate Western as "European" or "European and American"?

Yes, if that includes Canada.

...to make those theories actively engage with each other

Can I translate it as "to actively shed light on interrelations between each theory"?

If you like.

Only with first-hand knowledge of the fundamental texts can one really follow the adventures of critical thought.

Can I translate it as "Only with direct knowledge of foundational literature, journey to critical thinking becomes possible"?

"first-hand" knowledge is not clear to me. Does it mean that you have to actually read the original texts?

Yes, and yes. "First-hand" means actually reading the original texts. But since the Venuti reader is not available in Japanese(?), I would omit the reference to it.

### 1

"A theory sets the scene where the generation and selection process takes place." (p.1)

It means " a theory explains how ideas (options) are generated and selected".

The expression "sets the scene" is supposed to be a reference back to the etymology that connects "theory" with "theater."

I don't think the theory, at this stage, explains decision-making. It merely provide the terms entering into the decision-making, and the relations between the terms.

Perhaps an easy translation would be "a theory asks the questions that the translation process must solve", or "a theory provides the terms and potential rationales for the decisions of translators", or more weakly, "a theory underlies the generation and selection process."

### 1-2

Our interrelated names-for-things form models, and those models become theories, scenes set by ideas about what could or should in a translation. In other words, our basic terms encapsulate theories, even though we are mostly not aware of those theories.

The underlined portion is not very clear to me. Does it mean "those models become scenes to look at, which are formed by ideas about what could or should be done in a translation"?

A model (a set of concepts and relations) can be considered a scene, as in the theater (or a "set" in cinema) where we find a group of items contextualizing an action, before the action begins.

4

The theories can pose productive questions, and sometimes suggest successful answers. Theories can also be significant agents of change, especially when moved from one professional culture to another, or when they are made to challenge endemic thought (think about the Sanskrit idea of translation as "saying later").

The underlined sentence is not too clear to me. What do you mean by "professional culture" and "when they are made to challenge endemic thought"?

Professional culture – the culture of a profession, e.g. academics, or advertising people, or engineers. It could also be a "professional community."  
The theoretical ideas can challenge the traditional ideas held by a community.

The practical advantage we want to defend here is that of a plurality of paradigms. Rather than set out to defend one paradigm against all others, we are interested in promoting awareness that there are many valuable ways of approaching translation, any of which may prove useful or stimulating in a given situation.

Here, I suppose you mean to say that being aware of different paradigms helps translators in their actual practice. Or not?

No. "Practical" here merely means in the practice of applying thought, or in the real world of the way ideas work. You could delete the word "practical." I do not think that an awareness of theories necessarily helps translators in their work.

14-15

"This gives a further list of "stylistic procedures" operating closer to the sentence level. In most cases, the translator may be seen as following the constraints imposed by the target language, without many alternatives to choose between." (p.14)

After the three main points, you say "The individual translator does not really have much choice. This is why the examples can all be read in both directions". (p. 15)

Do you mean "although these lists show many kinds of procedures, translators don't have much choice when they are actually translating"?

Most of the examples here assume that the procedures are obligatory because of the nature of the two languages, e.g. "To the trains" is "The way to the trains" in French because French stylistics does not like to leave the prepositional phrase by itself (apparently). This is why the individual translator does not have much choice. It is also why the examples can be read in both directions: English allows some things; French does not.  
That said, I think that all these procedures could equally be illustration by non-obligatory shifts, which would then belong to the directional paradigm.

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When you say "more generalization when moving in that direction", you are talking about French into English, right?

Yes, into French, the more abstract language (apparently).

What do you mean by "the difference is in order to preserve the balance between the languages"?

I think I am trying to say too much in too few words here. In V&D's ideology, the two languages are equal in their overall expressive capacities but different in their preferred means. There is thus a constant balancing act between them: if French is strong at one thing, English is strong at another. If the translator then tries to force English structures onto French,

the balance will be lost. That is why translators are supposed to make all these linguistic shifts (the "differences") in order to conform to what is most normal in the target language. I hasten to add that I personally do not believe that all languages are in some kind of magical balance.

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You say, "... we would have to consider saying something like "bad-luck *martes* thirteenth," "Tuesday the thirteenth, bad-luck," or even "Tuesday the thirteenth, bad-luck day in Spanish-speaking countries."

You are intentionally using "martes" (instead of Tuesday) in the first example, right?

Yes. Loans can be legitimate translation procedures.

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"If we knew about the way people actually receive translations, this new approach could rise above many of the problems equivalence had in the days of structuralist linguistics." (p.37)

Is this "conditional type 2"? Are you basically saying that "it is unfortunate that since we do not know a lot about how people actually receive translations, this new view of seeing equivalence as a belief system cannot overcome many of the problems structuralists raised"? - this doesn't sound right. Perhaps, you are saying "if we have more information on how people receive translation, it is possible for this new approach to overcome the problems raised by structuralists? Please clarify.

I think you are saying the same thing twice, aren't you? Once in the negative, then again in the positive?

I think the basic point is this: relevance theory (as in Gutt) is great, but if it has no empirical component (to get data on what actually happens, or on what happens when there are different clients, etc.) then it really remains within the equivalence paradigm: it is condemned to assume that receivers assume "complete interpretative resemblance", which is another name for equivalence.

To "rise above" problems does not necessarily mean to solve them - it has more to do with moving into a new paradigm.

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"For some, history is not only enough but is also predominant: in the humanities, one might argue, any apparent law or universal must ultimately be dependent on context, and we have no real right to theorize beyond our own context."

Does this mean that "some people claim that history is not just one of the factors, but it is the factor"?

It means that, for some people in the humanities, all factors are historical.

If you accept this, then what we do is ultimately the writing of our own history - whatever laws and universals we may pretend to find are always the ones that are of interest to us.

86

"More problematic, these sociologists are overwhelmingly of single societies only, of systems in the "one side or the other" sense that has reigned within the descriptive paradigm."

I thought "one side or the other" is more like a characteristic of the "equivalence" paradigm. Am I missing something here?

Yes, it is a feature of both the equivalence and the part of descriptivism that was and remains systems-based.

You could add "that reigned within the equivalence and descriptive paradigms...".

90

Going back to the issue of "indeterminacy" and "uncertainty", how strictly are you differentiating the two terms? You seem to be using the two terms interchangeably in some cases. This is a big translation problem in Japanese. If we use two different words for them, we have to stick to them throughout, which would probably confuse the reader a bit. Could you please explain why you are using these two different terms?

No fundamental difference between them – or better, I am not using the difference in any technical way.

Uncertainty is generally from the perspective of the subject; indeterminacy is usually presented as a feature of the relations between conceptual items (in structuralism). But the outcome is the same.

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So our languages would shape the way we perceive the world. The masculine sins of Russian cannot really be a full equivalent of the feminine sins of German, and their rewards in death are similarly non-equivalent.

I suppose you mean "their views (masculine or feminine) of death" by "their rewards in death". Am I right?

No. The connection comes from "The wages of sin are death" (Romans 6:23).

98

It has also served in the descriptivist paradigm to portray the way translations are different yet belong to a common set (cf. Toury 1980; Halverson 1998).

In this sentence, what do you mean by "a common set"? Is it like a norm?

No. I simply mean a group of things, as in mathematical set theory.

100

'To bring things down to earth: the text is so firmly set in Paris that the French *pain* might fairly be rendered as baguette (as an English word) or even "French bread," allowing few glimpses of any pure meaning of bread." (p.100)

Why is this "bringing things down to earth"?

It is putting things in real-world terms. It is trying to see what choices a translator might actually have to make in practice, rather than in the abstract world of pure concepts.

109

"For example, Derrida (1985) criticizes Jakobson's use of "translation proper" as just one kind of "translation," as if the meaning of the term were stable in one place and not in another."

The "term" refers to "the term, translation", not "the term, translation proper", correct?

Yes, it refers to the term "translation."

111

"Translation can thus become metaphorical "inn of the distant" (Berman 1999)." (p. 111)

"inn of the distant" - does this mean "an inn for things from far away"?

It's a straight rendition of Berman's *auberge du lointain*.

The image works two ways. 1) translation is the place where a culture receives foreign traveler, as in an inn, 2) (ethical) translation is the place where a culture can discover how distant other cultures are from it.

I think a simple straight rendition should allow those two senses to remain potential.

## 112-113

"Seen in these crude binary terms, awareness of indeterminacy would be well served by any mode of translation able to extend internal knowledge as far as possible into the external sphere." (pp. 112-113)

Does this mean "any translation that can extend internal knowledge into the far-away place could raise awareness of indeterminacy"?

Not quite.

"Internal" refers to the world of the translator and the people who can see how a text has been translated.

"External" refers to translation-users who do not have access to the ST (because they don't know the language, or simply don't have the text).

People in the internal position are always aware of indeterminacy (every translation problem could have been solved a different way); those in the external position usually are not.

But there are ways of translating, or of presenting a translation, that allow the internal position to be appreciated, at least in part, by those in the external position.

But why consistent "deconstruction"? Is "deconstruction" itself a rigorous way of thinking?

Derrida was certainly rigorous. But very few of his literary surrogates are, in my humble opinion That is what I am implying by adding the adjective "consistent."

## 113

"For Arrojo, for consistent deconstruction, to analyze degrees of similarity would mean accepting the ideal of possible sameness ("more or less", with regard to what?), and thus falling into essentialism." (p.113)

When you say "for consistent deconstruction", do you mean "in order for Arrojo to be a consistent deconstructionist, she has to deconstruct what she says; and when she analyses her "more or less" reference, she sounds like an essentialist since she is assuming something stable to compare"?

I like your interpretation, but it's not what I was trying to get at.

By "consistent deconstruction" I simply mean a kind that is applied across the board, in a rigorous way.

The idea is then: If you accept that there can be greater or lesser degrees of similarity, you implicitly accept that the degree of similarity can be measured with respect to something, and the referent for the measure must be perfect (i.e. illusory, essentialist, nonexistent) equivalence.

I don't think Arrojo actually makes that argument (it is more in the analytical tradition), but it is one she could make.

## 115

If "abusive fidelity" is the mode of translating best suited to deconstruction, this does not mean that indeterminism cannot be found in all modes of translating across the board. Cannot a deconstructionist approach, which is basically a way of interpreting texts, be applied to any translation at all?" (p.115)

I can do "literal translation" for these sentences, but I'm not sure if I really get it. Are you saying: "Even if abusive fidelity is a translation method "prescribed" by deconstructionists, there is still indeterminism found in some translating. Deconstruction is a way of interpreting texts. We should be able to learn from deconstruction when translating"?

I'll paraphrase what I'm trying to get at here:

"Abusive fidelity," which is a justification of a kind of literalism, can reveal the kinds of indeterminism (under-justified shifts and gaps) that are of interest to deconstructionists, and so it would seem to correspond to what deconstructionists have been doing with indeterminism. However, deconstruction is basically a way of interpreting texts, and thus of interpreting translations. It can be used, I suggest, to receive and analyze any kind of translation at all.

There are some things to be careful about here: 1) I am not saying that deconstructionists prescribe any particular translation method, and 2) I am not saying that translators should learn from deconstruction.

When *Skopos* theory names its dominant factor as this *Skopos* we have called "purpose," is that not also an essentialism, an assumption of stable meaning?

This is not too clear to me. Do you mean "When *Skopos* theory refers to "purpose" or *Skopos* as its dominant factor"?

Yes.

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"Some theories assume that the (great) source text is full of meaning in a way to which translation will be adequate." (p. 116)

Does this mean "a great source text can be interpreted in a number of ways, and there can be a number of translations that are adequate in representing a meaning (meanings) of the text"?

No. It means (in terms of the theory being presented) that all translations will always be inadequate to the plenitude of the (great) source text.

That is why these theories then talk about similarity rather than equivalence.

134

"The contradiction is more apparent than real because different things are happening at different levels, at different stages: text reuse is an affair of technology and internationalization, whereas adaptation is something that tends to be done by policy-makers or marketing experts."

I'm not certain about "more apparent than real". Can you please elaborate on that?

There is a contradiction in terms of thought and procedure, but the contradiction is not a conflict because different people are doing different things.

145

One of the difficulties of reading Bhabha is that he presupposes everyone has a working knowledge of all these texts, as professors of literature tend to assume.

Are you implying that Bhabha believes that he has a working knowledge of these texts (but he doesn't, in actuality), and his discussion is based on the "knowledge" he believes to have?

No. He thinks his reader has already read all those texts. (One of my readers found my comment sarcastic, so perhaps it should be eliminated.)

Those examples do indeed look like translations; the blasphemy can fairly be described as "a transgressive act of cultural translation;" there is thus some substance to the claim that a certain kind of cross-cultural writing can be translational. Then again, what kind of theorization can allow those few words to become representative of whole genres of discourse?

The underlined: you mean "cultural translation", right?

No, "those few words" refer to the name Mahound and the names of the prostitutes.

Bhabha nevertheless wants nothing of this "fleetingness" (and thereby forgoes numerous possible puns on *Flüchtling* as a "displaced person," a "refugee," an "escapee").

The underlined: Can I translate it as "thereby, Bhabha forgoes many opportunities to link *Flüchtling* and a 'displaced person', a 'refugee' or an 'escapee'"?

The German term *Flüchtling* means displaced person, a refugee, an escapee. It shares the morphology of *Flüchtigkeit*, fleetingness (also "volatility," in Chemistry).

147

"The link with migration highlights the way translation ensues from material movements." (p. 147)

Here, you are talking about physical movements (people and things), right? You did not use the word "material" to mean "very important", correct?

Yes, people and things.

"Bhabha simply points to this space between, elsewhere termed the "third space," where the terms of these questions are enacted." (p. 147)

Are you saying that "Bhabha is just pointing to the "third space', where these questions are addressed in certain ways, but not solved"?

The "third space" is Bhabha's main concept in that book - it is the space where cultures mix, producing hybridity. So he is really doing more than "pointing," I suppose - he is indicating and conceptualizing.

The third space does not solve problems as much as it dissolves them. For example, the equivalence paradigm often presents us with a choice to make between the source and the target sides. In the third space of cultural translation, that problem does not present itself because the two sides are not separate - there is no such choice to be made.

What do you mean by "the terms are enacted"?

OK, yes, that is problematic.

I really mean "acted out" or "embodied," in the sense that people actually leave one country and enter another, and they argue about these questions and make decisions - usually small incremental ones. You could also say "acted upon," I suppose.

As a piece of theorizing, Bhabha's text does not choose between the alternatives it presents. Should the migrant remain unchanged, or should they integrate? What should be their home language?

The underlined: Does it mean "As for whether or not Bhabha is theorizing in his book"?

No. It means "when considered as a theory"

148

No other paradigm has so vigorously raised the problem of the two-side border figured by translations (see 3.5 above), although the uncertainty paradigm certainly questions the way that borders produce illusory oppositions.

The underlined: What do you mean by "figured"? Do you mean to say "a border with two sides, which is implied by translation"?

Yes, that is what I mean. The verb "figured" refers to a fictional world projected by the translation form.

...Benjamin and Derrida, for example, were ultimately engaged in reading and translating *texts*, attempting to bring out multiple potential meanings, Bhabha makes rather more programmatically statements about the world, without much heed for second thoughts (e.g. "Rushdie translates this into the migrant's dream of survival").

The underlined: Is it like "cliché"?

No. I refer to "programmatically" in the sense of a political program, expressing certitudes about the world and proposing that these certitudes are a basis for action. You could perhaps use "self-confident" instead of "programmatically."

151

"This effectively maps out a kind of study in which there are many movements between systems, only some of those movements can be seen in translations, and the same kinds of movements are crossing borders within systems as well." (pp. 151-152)

"effectively": in an effective way" or "virtually"?

In effect / In fact / The result of this is...

154-155

We render this here as "**translation sociology**" rather than "the sociology of translation" because, for us, the "translation" part refers to the method of analysis rather than to the object under analysis (although the theory would reject this distinction).

The underlined: What does "the theory" refer to? Is it the theory of "translation sociology"?

It refers to the theories elaborated with translation sociology. I suspect that this whole passage is irrelevant in Japanese. Delete it?

155

At each stage in the analysis, from the actions of the scallops to those of the fishermen, of the scientists and indeed of the sociologist, there is a common process by which one actor or group is taken to represent (or speak on behalf of) others.

The underlined: Did the scallops really "take actions"? I take it they treat people and things equally, right?

Yes, the scallops grow and die, and have an interest in the research because they want to survive. The French scallops also do not want to be replaced by Japanese scallops, so their struggle to survive is also part of nationalistic pride.

158

Translation is the figure of intellectual normadism, moving from discipline to discipline, but that was already in Serres." (p. 158)

"the figure of intellectual normadism" -- does "the figure" mean metaphor, symbol, analogy, or something else?

"Figure" here refers to the symbolic form that gives identity to a diffuse thing.

So any and all of your proposals would be valid, I suspect.

159

"In terms of academic markets, if nothing else, the United States has provided a situation where what we have called the uncertainty paradigm could flourish into several modes of generalized translation." (p. 159)

What specifically are you referring to when you say "several modes of generalized translation"?

The reference is to views that find translation in mixes of cultures, immigration, the inspiration of works of art, genetic engineering, love, international English, and that sort of thing. For an example, see Emily Apter's *The Translation Zone*, reviewed here: [http://www.tinet.cat/~apym/on-line/reviews/review\\_apter\\_target.pdf](http://www.tinet.cat/~apym/on-line/reviews/review_apter_target.pdf)

160

"To oppose this, indeed to oppose excessive theorizing, he (Berman) argues for a concept of "restrained translation" that respects the letter of the foreign text." (p. 160)

Here, does "the letter of the foreign text" mean "the literal meaning of the foreign text"? Is Berman arguing not to stray away from the source text?

I don't think I would restrict Berman to "the literal meaning." It's more like respect for the integrity of the foreign text.

161

The result is a paradoxical eclipse of alterity, as seen by **Harish Trivedi**: "Rather than help us encounter and experience other cultures, translation would have been assimilated in just one monolingual global culture" (2007: 286). This critique fits in with Berman's fear of "global translatability," and indeed with a mode of theorization where the model "postmodern society" somehow fits all societies, and the one kind of "translation correctly understood" (after reading Walter Benjamin, in English) accounts for all translation.

The underlined: I understand that this critique fits in with Berman's fear, but I'm sorry I don't quite understand why it fits in with the mode of theorization you discuss here. Could you explain?

The mode of theorization referred to is one in which there is just one model of "society" (multilingual and multiethnic) in which translation is the model for communication between the cultural groups. The theorization does not have any data on any one particular society, so its model is presented as being suitable for all societies. Also, the mode of theorizing does not look at or analyze any particular translation, so its model of translation is made to represent all possible translations.

164

Do the above statements actually present a theory of translation, or a clear translation theory?

The underlined: do you mean "a theory concerning translation, or a clear well-thought-out translation-specific theory"? -- Yes, I'm confused.

Let's simplify -- "actually present a theory of translation?"

165

"Skopos theory, for me, is a collection of quite evident things, unfortunately unable to solve ethical problems involving competing purposes." (p. 165)

Here, you are supposed to say good things and bad things about the paradigms after equivalence. It seems to me, however, you are saying two bad things about Skopos -- 1) it is a collection of obvious things (common sense), and 2) it cannot provide a solution in cases where different purposes are competing. Am I missing something here?

In saying these things are evident, I hoped I was pointing out my agreement with them. I mean, it is a good point (I have a very limited repertoire when it comes to recognizing good points!).