Vinay and Darbelnet and the politics of translation solutions

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Some translation scholars want us all to be political activists, as is their right and perhaps obligation. The moral connection between politics and translation usually concerns two kinds of observation: first, only rich and powerful groups tend to have their messages moved between languages (the poor and powerless rarely determine which messages are sent); second, translators habitually modify messages in the interests of one group or another, thus meddling in power relations beneath a cloak of default invisibility. In both those ways, translation helps shape the relations of belonging that in turn form the polis, the basis of any politics.

Those two kinds of observations steer Translation Studies well away from its more traditional concerns, notably the linguistic comparison of texts and the pedagogical control of equivalence. We are called on to do more than linguistics, it seems. Our past thus somehow becomes irrelevant, even innocent: politics concerns different things, in a nasty new world. Or does it? Were our traditional descriptions really so neutral? Are our inherited taxonomies just innocuous technicalities?

Here I propose to seek out politics in a terrain where it would seem not to exist. I take one of the very basic problems in traditional Translation Studies: the identification of the ways translators solve problems, leading to lists of "translation solutions" (otherwise known as "procedures", "techniques" and sometimes "strategies"). Surely nothing could be drier or more neutral than a description of the translator's basic toolkit! What political *enjeu* could possibly lurk there?

The prime example of a long-lasting taxonomy of translation solutions is undoubtedly Vinay and Darbelnet's traditional list of what they termed "procedures", handed down and repeated for over fifty years. If we can find the politics in them, then what about the rest?

Vinay and Darbelnet hit the road

One day in the mid 1950s, Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet were driving from New York to Montreal. Their account, in the introduction to their landmark *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* of 1958, is one of the most entertaining passages in Translation Studies:

> The story begins on the highway from New York to Montréal. After the crowds and crossroads of Manhattan, suddenly all is calm: the sober order of a long double carriageway […]. Yet traffic signs punctuate the route. We first read them without paying much attention, to check we are headed the right way, but then with more interest, since we are linguists going to Montréal, and we cannot help but discuss language: *Linguistics will out!* As the signs multiply, our initial impressions are

confirmed: we are indeed in the United States, in an English-speaking country, not because of the landscape but because of the stylistics of the traffic signs. They are very clear, of course, but no one would have written like that in French. […] (1958/1972: 17; my translation, here and throughout)

The country is not the landscape; it is not even the English language; it is in the *way* the signs are phrased. This is clearly not an affair of grammar alone. It might have something to do with the "stylistics" that the linguists put in the title of their book:

> The driver reads out aloud, the passenger uses the back of an envelope to note down the main texts that this ever-watchful administration lavishes upon its highway travellers: KEEP TO THE RIGHT. NO PASSING. SLOW MEN AT WORK. STOP WHEN SCHOOL BUS STOPS. THICKLY SETTLED. STAY IN SINGLE FILE. SLIPPERY WHEN WET. TRUCKS ENTERING ON THE LEFT. CATTLE CROSSING. DUAL HIGHWAY ENDS.
> Is one not immediately struck by the almost paternal and softly authoritarian nature of these meta-traffic injunctions? We are advised to stay in the same lane as the other cars, to stop if the school bus stops, to go more slowly because some of our contemporaries are working, to be aware that the two lanes, separated by a small strip of green, are about to join. For the French, none of this sounds at all official. It is as if we were having a polite if silent conversation with the State of New York Department of Main Roads, on small notes secretly passed to from each new thicket of red maple or spruce. A truly charming administration, so kind as to inform us, on the edge of a promise-filled escapade: THIS SIGN LEGALLY CLOSES THIS ROAD. […]

Note here the assumption of a unitary *voice* behind the signs. Locating the voice is not easy, though: the conversation with the Department of Main Roads is humorous because it is as unlikely as the trees handing out the signs. Part of that voice is surely associated with the English language and culture, at least as a structure that allows certain dispositions and language behaviors more than others. However, the way that voice somehow comes from a whole language is one the many things that stylistics has never made clear, and it is not very clear here. This is surely a voice from the *authority* behind the language, from an official government institution, of the kind that sets limits and guidelines as to what uses of language are officially correct. That might be the first kind of political voice that stylistics is attuned to hear: institutional limits and guidelines, even when soft and friendly. The journey continues:

> We soon reach the Canadian border, where the language of our forefathers is music to our ears. The Canadian highway is built on the same principles as the American one except that its signs are bilingual. After SLOW, written on the road-surface in enormous letters, comes LENTEMENT, which takes up the entire width of the highway. What an unwieldy adverb! What a pity French never made the adjective LENT into an adverb…. But, come to think of it, is LENTEMENT really the equivalent of SLOW? We begin to have doubts, as one always does when shifting between languages, when our SLIPPERY WHEN WET reappears around a bend,

followed by the French GLISSANT SI HUMIDE. Whoa!, as the Lone Ranger would say, let's pause a while on this SOFT SHOULDER, thankfully caressed by no translation as yet, and meditate this SI, this 'if,' more slippery than an acre of ice. No monolingual French speaker would ever come straight out with that, nor would they spray paint over the road for the sake of a long adverb ending in -MENT. Here we reach a key point, a sort of turnpike between two languages. But of course—*parbleu!*—instead of LENTEMENT it should have been RALENTIR! And as for our road slippery 'if' wet, they should have said, to respect the spirit of the French language…

But does it really matter?

This is indeed a key example. The English adverbial "Slow" corresponds to the French infinitive "Ralentir," and a translation mistake rears its ugly head when the adverbial is rendered as an adverbial. Fair enough. So what the linguists are actually noting here in Canada? Are they translations, perhaps bad translations, to be compared with the pure non-translations of France? Not really: the signs are just signs, not particularly presented as translations. We don't know who write them; there is no evidence of one language being the start and the other being the end of a translation process. And who, for that matter, are these linguists? Both, as it happens, were from France, not Canada: they are resolutely *not* from the government authority that controls these particular roads. So when they hear "French," they are actually hearing voices from their ancestors across the ocean. Here are the biographies:

Jean Darbelnet (1904-1990) was born in Paris and studied at the Sorbonne before working as a reader at the universities of Wales, Edinburgh, and Manchester. In 1938-39 he taught French at Harvard before moving to Canada in 1940, where he taught at McGill until 1946, setting up a three-year program of night classes in translation. He later taught at Bowdoin College and Laval University.

Jean-Paul Vinay (1910-1999) was born in Paris and studied English at the Sorbonne before obtaining an MA in Phonetics and Philology from the University of London in 1937. He served with the French army in 1939-40 as a liaison officer with the British Expeditionary Forces. In 1946 he moved to Canada, where he taught at the University of Montreal as professor and head of the Department of Linguistics and Translation. In addition to his work on translation he directed the publication of a bilingual *Canadian Dictionary* in 1962 and became well known through a television course called *Speaking French*. In 1967 he moved to the University of Victoria in British Columbia. He was awarded with the French Legion of Honor and the Order of Canada.

So the "language of [their] forefathers" is not Canadian French but very much the French of the colonial center, the metropolis, the source of ultimate authority. And their mission, driving into Canada in order to teach French, is to defend the purity of the centralized language, or something like that.

So there are different voices, from different institutions, all conveying different kinds of authority. Vinay and Darbelnet are actually arguing that one kind of authority, one mode of postcolonial belonging, should win out over the others.

Then again, if the purpose of the signs is to save lives, surely it would have been better to run some empirical tests, to see whether the infinitive or the adverbial is better at getting drivers to slow down? But that would not be stylistics, would it?

And for that matter, are we sure that the English is always "Slow"? There are actually many signs out there that say "Drive slowly," with the infinitive, and "Slow down," which is grammatically the same as the French. Then in Sacramento it seems they have tried "Please Slow Drively,"[1] which should be quite good at getting puzzled drivers to decelerate. Yes, reformulation exists; there is perhaps not just one voice available in English.

We left the linguists grappling with a problem not in English, but in French:

> Well, what exactly? The phrase [for "road slippery when…"] did not come straight to mind. We are clearly dealing with a second kind of stylistics here, based not just on one language but on two at the same time. The solution to our problem would require a comparative study, a comparative stylistics. The translator had done no more than translate. And we, impregnated as we were with adjectival and conditional viscosity, hesitated to correct the translation. This is because in order to make a comparison, one needs two objects to compare, and we only had one, the English text, whose manifest character dominated us entirely. In order to compare, we would have needed a French text that was equivalent (we will have to define this term), that was not influenced by a semiological process, a text spontaneously emitted by a monolingual brain, in response to a situation that is in all ways comparable.

Vinay and Darbelnet's stylistics thereby stays clear of translations; it does not trust them: translations always risk contamination. Authority and purity are magically located in "a monolingual brain," which is somewhere else, back in Paris. Who has a monolingual brain? Certainly not the linguists, who have no problem assuming knowledge of at least two languages, and their past is marked by movements between at least two cultures. In fact, no one cited by Vinay and Darbelnet could be safely identified as a monolingual – nor perhaps can anyone at all, if we accept that we learn different varieties of one or several languages as we progress through life. This "monolingual brain" is more like an active construction of an ideal land, virtually stored in the imaginary of the linguists, a land that has only one voice, only one authority, and that no longer exists and probably never did. It is an ideal, to which one needs an… equivalent?

Did you notice "equivalent" in the above passage? Vinay and Darbelnet have actually been using the word all along (as in, "Is *Lentement* really the equivalent of *Slow*?"). Here, though, they recognize the need for an explanation: "a French text that was equivalent (we will have to define this term)." The strange thing is that they never really offer a formal definition of "equivalent." In the Glossary to their 1958 book they certainly include *équivalence*, defined as follows:

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[1] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2382237/California-motorists-puzzled-Please-Slow-Drively-road-sign.html. Accessed November 2013.

Translation procedure that accounts for the same situation as in the original, but with an entirely different expression, for example "The story so far" rendered as "résumé des chapitres précédents" ["summary of the previous chapters"].

But that is the solution type called *équivalence* in French, translated by Chesterman (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958/1989: 67) as "total syntagmatic change" and tentatively named "correspondence" in my own work. One might quibble about an example or two (the French rendition of "the story so far" looks like a change of perspective, which could just as easily be classified as "modulation"), but the general territory of the beast looks plain enough. That usage is clearly quite different from the more general term "equivalent," as in "there is no equivalent for this word." It is this second, looser, more general sense that Vinay and Darbelnet say, correctly, that they have to define. And then they do not define it, as far as I can see. Or do they? We read on:

> Our hesitation was well justified. We were moving along new routes, halfway between the two languages whose specific principles we presume to know. And yet we hesitate to carry out the passage of a text from one language to the other. Our doubts concern two points: a) the choice of a French text that owes nothing to the English text but covers the same reality, and b) the reasons that make us choose one translation rather than another.

Strange that they should need two things: the product of a monolingual brain, and only then the "reasons" that could make a translation anything like that product. If we focus for a moment just on the first part, "the choice of a text," is not that where we might find the missing definition? Is an "equivalent" a text in the target language that "owes nothing to the start text but covers the same reality"? If so, the game is played not just in the essentialist assumption of a "monolingual brain" but also in the similarly precarious belief of "the same reality." Who could say the realities were the same? Certainly not the "monolingual brain." Only the linguists themselves could presume to locate the sameness of reality. So they come out as the ultimate authority, able to rival, in the field of language, the authority of government institutions, and able to muster the legacies of ancestors. Linguistics will out!

All things considered, there are at least three subjectivities involved here: the infallible monolingual brain situated somewhere around Paris, the all-seeing but potentially contaminated linguists who travel between the languages, and the eminently fallible translator who produces the signs in need of correction (even though the signs are not translations). To these we could add two further subjectivities: the voice fancifully attributed to the State of New York Department of Main Roads, then a voice that presumably speaks from something like the Quebec Transportation Department, which fails to be heard because the (non-)translations are not trusted. The trouble is, if we add these two further voices as part of the "reality," how could the realities ever be the same? We thus reach a third major and equally precarious assumption (alongside "the monolingual brain" and "the same reality"): a nonlinguistic reality – which is a reality about which we obviously cannot speak.

Put all those assumptions together, and Vinay and Darbelnet do not seem to be doing very well. They have brought across some of the terms used by Bally ("equivalent"

is certainly one of them), but there is strangely no reference to anything like Bally's concern with function, nor really with his attention to the purely methodological work of the linguist. Instead of visible method, here we have dismissive irony. Vinay and Darbelnet proceed undaunted, pragmatists making sense of their journey:

> Hence our conclusion, already quite obvious: the passage from language A to language B, to express the same reality X – the passage is usually called "translation" –, is the object of a specific discipline, comparative in nature, whose goal is to explain this mechanism and to assist in the carrying out of the passage by isolating laws valid for the two languages concerned. Translation thus becomes a special case, a practical application, of comparative stylistics. (1958/1972: 20)

The task of comparative stylistics would be to produce a complete set of such "procedures" (*procédés*). Vinay and Darbelnet then propose that translators who want to produce natural-sounding texts should employ the same procedures. The sub-title of their book is thus "Méthode de traduction," Method of Translation – comparative rhetoric is presented as a way of translating, even though none of the examples needs to have ever been produced by translators (or so it seems from the lack of method).

This translation method is glossed as "a set of rules that govern the miracle of a perfect translation," which is indeed miraculous. Given the multiplicity of voices hanging around, who or what could ever pretend to recognize the perfect translation? Perhaps only the French forefathers, who speak through the travelling French linguists, protected from contamination by methodless linguistics.

Vinay and Darbelnet's main solution types

Vinay and Darbelnet were not great theoretical linguists – they were probably having too much fun. They certainly drew on Bally, citing him profusely with respect to "loan," "syntactic calque," "transposition," "explicitation," and occasional portrayal of the specific characteristics ("genie") of the French language. They also refer to a thesis by Georges Panneton, defended in Montreal in 1945, on transposition as a "principle of translation." And they explicitly say they have taken the term "modulation" from Panneton (1958/1972: 51), whom we shall soon meet. For the rest, they are linguists who are looking closely at languages.

Perhaps because of their proximity to practical application, Vinay and Darbelnet's work had a marked impact on the training of translators and indeed on the development of Translation Studies. Their book was revised in 1960, reprinted in 1968, 1972, 1977, and 1984, and translated into English by Juan Sager and M. J. Hamel in 1995. Their typology of translation solutions has also inspired many similar lists, as we shall see later in this book.

Vinay and Darbelnet's basic schema is represented in Table 1, which I have translated from the 1972 edition (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958/1972: 55). Here I omit aspects like the distinctions between the "optional" and "obligatory" modes of modulation and transposition, and I replace the French term "*équivalence*" with "correspondence," since our contemporary sense of "equivalence" would probably cover all the examples enlisted in the entire table. Vinay and Darbelnet also offer a list of supplementary "prosodic effects," to which we will come in due course.

The visual form of the table is meaningful. At the center stands "literal translation": if translators cannot find a solution on that level, then they should move either upwards (incorporating elements from the start text) or downwards (drawing on elements in the target language and/or culture). The upward movement is into the territory of "direct translation" and apparently involves less difficulty (I would prefer to talk about less risk); the downward movement involves "oblique translation" (a visual metaphor whose virtues I have never really appreciated[2]) and is said to be more difficult (or more risky). The safety zone is undoubtedly in the middle. The seven solution types each come with examples on three levels of usage: lexis, collocation (*agencement*), and message. Malblanc (1963) reproduces exactly the same table but gives examples comparing French and German.

Table 1 Vinay and Darbelnet's general table of translation solutions (my translation from Vinay and Darbelnet 1958/1972: 55)

	Lexis	Collocation	Message
1. Loan	Fr. Bulldozer Eng. Fuselage	Fr. science-fiction Eng. à la mode	Fr. five o'Clock Tea Eng. Bon voyage
2. Calque	Fr. économiquement faible Eng. Normal School	Fr. Lutétia Palace Eng. Governor General	Fr. Compliments de la Saison Eng. Take it or leave it.
3. Literal translation	Fr. Encre Eng. Ink	Fr. L'encre est sur la table Eng. The ink is on the table	Fr. Quelle heure est-il? Eng. What time is it?
4. Transposition	Fr. Expéditeur: Eng. From:	Fr. Depuis la revalorisation du bois Eng. As timber becomes more valuable	Fr. Défense de fumer Eng. No smoking
5. Modulation	Fr. peu profond Eng. Shallow	Fr. Donnez un peu de votre sang Eng. Give a pint of your blood	Fr. Complet Eng. No Vacancies
6. Correspondence (*équivalence*)	Fr. (milit.) la soupe Eng. (milit.) tea	Fr. Comme un chien dans un jeu de quilles Eng. Like a bull in a china shop	Fr. château de cartes Eng. hollow triumph
7. Adaptation	Fr. Cyclisme Br.Eng. cricket Am.Eng. baseball	Fr. en un clin d'œil Eng. before you could say Jack Robinson	Fr. Bon appetit! Am.Eng. Hi!

The description of these "procedures" takes just nine pages (1958/1972: 46-54),

Is there rhyme or reason in the list?

Vinay and Darbelnet divide their book into three large sections for their three levels of discourse: lexis, collocation, and "message." This allows the above solution types to be explained and exemplified in different ways for each level. Unfortunately the typology of "prosodic effects" thereby becomes particularly difficult to keep track of. The list has no

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[2] Muñoz Martín (2000: 131) suggests that the term probably comes from Latin grammar, where the nominative case is the *casus rectus* and all other cases are *casus obliqui*.

theoretical reason to be closed (there could be more categories, there could be fewer), and there are no strong reasons why some solutions are relegated to the B team ("prosodic effects"). In all, the inundation of examples and quick leaps to abstraction cover over a lack of careful theorization.

When research is conducted bottom-up, from texts to categories, numerous other solution types appear. Indeed, quite a few others are named in the course of Vinay and Darbelnet's various discussions. The question is then whether we need a "miscellaneous" category, or whether the more occasional solutions can be construed as sub-types of the more general types.

Translation preferences and culture as distinction

Instead of reasons, Vinay and Darbelnet distribute *values*: good words for everything that is "oblique" translation, bad words for everything that runs the risk of interference from English, more or less. Since this binary ideology runs counter to the very reasons why the solution types are of interest to me, it is as well to dispense with it here. I start from the values expressed in the nine pages where Vinay and Darbelnet first describe their solution types.

In their initial editions, Vinay and Darbelnet posit that innocuous calques like "les quatre Grands" ("the four great powers") are "in the minds of some translators, the most concrete expression of the abomination of desolation" (1958/1972: 48). What the hell is this? If you know your Bible (Daniel 9:27, 1 Maccabees 1:54, Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14), the allusion should probably work as a very weak joke, since it is itself a calque from Biblical Hebrew and Greek, I suppose. This kind of discursive sophistication is scarcely innocent. It separates an inner readership of *intimes* from the rest, creating smug satisfaction if you are on the right side, and perplexity if not. This discursive division between civilized and less-civilized then becomes the strategy underlying the distribution of all further values.

When writing in defense of Correspondence, Vinay and Darbelnet heap gratuitous invective on mediators who might inadvertently transfer a structure from one language to another. We are told that certain "so-called bilinguals suffer from permanent contact with the two languages and finish up knowing neither of them" (1958/1972: 52). This is no doubt a light-hearted quip, like the Biblical allusion, yet it is lapidary in more than one sense. There are indeed people who are left stranded between languages, with no formal education in either, and who are seriously disempowered as a result. In my native Australia there are cases where the transmission of indigenous languages has been broken by force and schooling in English is inadequate – people are stranded between two languages. In Catalonia, where I live, many adult speakers of Catalan had no formal education in that language (thanks to the centralist language policy under Franco) and are thus sometimes in serious doubt as to what is Catalan and what is Spanish, which is another mode of being stranded and disempowered on a long-term basis. The problem in such cases, however, is not the fact of bilingualism but the forceful exclusion of a language from school systems. If you look at things quantitatively, most of the world's language users live in constant contact with more than one language, and many of them enjoy and play with the wealth of language resources thus made available: code-switching and code-mixing can be relished without any loss of communicative value.

Monolingual speakers, especially of English, are actually the great exception here. To suggest that constant contact with two languages necessarily leads to degradation is a very cheap shot, possibly aimed at the many Quebecois who live bilingual lives. And the implication, of course, is that linguistic decisions should be made by those who maintain a significant degree of monolingualism, or who are magically able to keep the languages separate in their brains, in a way that others somehow cannot. Vinay and Darbelnet's readers are invited to eschew one condition and to aspire to the other: the Quebeckers should really try to speak like the French, and implicitly like the expert linguists who have come from France. This is how the play of opposed voices becomes a distribution of cultural values.

Further clues about this postcolonial distribution of values are given in the very next sentence, where we learn that a "perfectly organized language" should not accept interference by translators:

> […] only authors can allow themselves such escapades, since the success or failure of the calques will then reflect on them alone. In a translation, you have to stick to the classic forms. (1958/1972: 52)

This implies, of course, that the translator is not an author, even though Vinay and Darbelnet are elsewhere demanding that translators engage in degrees of transposition and modulation that require significant amounts of creative linguistic work. Since the argument is about responsibility, it could mean that the translator is not a "principal," in something like Goffman's sense of the person who takes responsibility for the utterance. Goffman, however, was talking about responsibility to what is said;[3] here, in translation, it is a question of responsibility for the *way* things are said. Vinay and Darbelnet give no actual reason why translators should not bear that responsibility, why they should not be named as such, and why they should not be treated as authors in that respect. In place of argument, they present no more than authority – no doubt the authority that they themselves assume as authors, from France.

When Vinay and Darbelnet justify Adaptation, they indulge in further invective about the dire consequences for the world if these "oblique" translation strategies are not used properly: "one fears that four-fifths of the globe will live exclusively on bad translations and intellectually starve on slop for cats" (1958/1972: 54).[4] What? Yes, that's what they say, more or less: "bouillie pour les chats," perhaps "boiled left-overs," but certainly for cats. Sager and Hamel render this as "a diet of linguistic pap" (1958/1995: 40), which is not bad – "pap" is a lovely word to use, sparingly, although it does seem to soften the blow and rather loses the sense of sub-human degradation coming from mixes. Chesterman (translating Vinay and Darbelnet 1958/1989: 69) goes for "this diet of pulped catfood," which does retain the mix and the lower form of life, but I thought pulping was what happened to printed pap (finding this kind of translation solution is indeed difficult and creative!). The message is nevertheless clear: If you, poor translator, risk allowing English to interfere with good French, the result will be a global stew and your readers

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[3] Goffman actually describes the principal in terms of responsibility to content: "someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say" (1981: 146). The specific responsibility of translators is investigated in Pym (2012).

[4] "on peut craindre de voir les quatre-cinquièmes du globe se nourrir exclusivement de traductions et périr intellectuellement de ce régime de bouillie pour les chats" (1958/1972: 54).

will not be proper humans. The degraded literalism apparently tolerated by international organizations is thereby summarily dismissed by Vinay and Darbelnet as "gibberish that has no name in any language but which René Étiemble rightly calls a 'trans-Atlantic pidgin'" (1958/1972: 53).[5] Literalist translations, it seems, will reduce us to a world of cats, gibberish, and non-language.

This use of insult instead of argument was once widespread in Francophone discussions of translation, and Vinay and Darbelnet were by no means the most extreme in this regard. As noted, Georges Panneton, whom Vinay and Darbelnet lean on for their terms "transposition" and "modulation," presented his thesis in the heady days of October 1945 – the end of the Second World War, with France and Canada on the winning side, might have justified a certain euphoria about the cultural tasks to come. Panneton opposes Transposition (of which he names Modulation as a variant) to "literal or timid translation" in such a way that Transposition alone can give the text "freedom to develop an unlimited power of interpretation" (1945: I). Panneton is steadfastly opposed to "infiltration by Anglicisms" (ibid.) and assures us that "no other language has shone on a par with French" (1945: II). The overarching ideology is one of progress, development, and attainment of a cultural pinnacle from which French and English can presume to speak for the world:

> Our sketch of a general history of translation traces the gradual rise of the art of transposition, running parallel to literary progress, with the global movement of translation reaching its highest point in the ethnic development and evolution of two prototypical adult neo-European languages, English and French, whose double drive is undoubtedly primordial on the American continent. (1945: II)

I hesitate to cite much more – but there is plenty in the same vein.[6] World linguistic evolution, it seems, has been led by Indoeuropean, the two adult strands of which meet at its highest of high points: yes, of course, a bilingual Canada: "The prestigious sign of bilingualism, evocative of the highest civilizations […] bestows on us a unique distinction in the hierarchy of peoples. Need it be proved?" (1945: 7). Well, um…Vinay and Darbelnet, we have seen, were far more circumspect on the topic of bilingualism. Although they certainly shared Panneton's translation preferences, they toned down the evolutionary glory, at least. But neither they nor Panneton believed that such assertions required any evidence.

Things similar can also be traced in the wake of Vinay and Darbelnet. Here I pick up one of their more famous examples (if you google the French, more than half the hits refer to the sentence as a translation example):

> He swam across the river.
> Il traversa la rivière à la nage.
> [He crossed the river by swimming] (1958/1972: 58)

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[5] "un galimatias qui n'a de nom dans aucune langue." Chesterman renders "*galimatias*" as "balderdash."
[6] Okay, just one more: "Transposition frees translation from its empirical corset, renews and elevates it, rejuvenated, to the higher realm of the adult language, more subtle and more fluent" (1945: 25).

Dominique Aury (Anne Cécile Desclos), in her preface to Mounin (1963: ix), ironically rejoices in the fact that in this example the linguists can intervene to help the French from rendering the English word-for-word as "Il nagea à travers la rivière." That literalism would mean translating the English into "Patagonian" ("traduire en patagon"), she says. Into what? One supposes the reference is to an imaginary language that is a long way from civilization and is spoken by indigenous non-Indoeuropeans, or cats, in any case by people who are not like "us." And this is amusing, unless you are from Patagonia, where you might speak Spanish, or perhaps Welsh, while pre-colonial languages like Tehuelche have died. But why should that matter to the pinnacles of civilization?

In a fine but largely forgotten polemical paper, Jean-Louis Laugier (1973) picks up the same example, notes the implicit racism with regard to Patagonians, and asks why, after all, the French translation should *not* be the word-for-word "Il nagea à travers la rivière": "We should at least recognize this marvelous possibility of reading English in French" (1973: 31). Further, if the purpose of *literary* translation is to introduce the reader to new and exciting *forms*, tantalizingly alien at times, then why not the word-for-word version? Laugier agrees that the reader might not learn much English from the exercise, "but we at least show something, and we let in a little fresh air [*nous nous aérons un peu*]" (ibid.).

So what actual arguments could be used against Laugier's fresh air?

Barbara Folkart (1991), perhaps alone, has taken Laugier seriously, perhaps too seriously. She gratuitously theorizes his proposed lake-swimming rendition as "material translation," "ethnolinguistic translation," and "exoticism," understood as "this grain that constitutes the presence of the medium in the message" (1991: 300) – you're doing very well when you get retro allusions to Barthes and McLuhan all in the one sentence! Folkart criticizes Laugier's proposal because it is only one sentence, bereft of context. Yes, there is a serious argument here: if you put Laugier's literalism in an actual context, using close literalism for a whole literary work, the effect becomes unreadable, or overwhelming, or philological, and ultimately offers the reader the quite obvious piece of information that the start text was in English: "instead of true access to the Other, Laugier offers the reader no more than junk tourism [*tourisme de pacotille*]: America in a fortnight, English on cassettes, to listen to while you sleep" (1991: 303). In a later study, Folkart further ironizes Laugier's literalist river-crossing as a "lofty ideal" (2007: 6). Once again, an attempted argument dissolves into little more than facile derision.[7] Why use argument or evidence if you can just pooh-pooh?

Henri Meschonnic (1999: 110) also briefly mentions the literalist river, dismissing the banality of grammatical correctness: "[…] a problem of the *language system* [*la langue*]. For 'comparative stylistics'. Of the kind *he swam across the river*, 'il traversa la rivière à la nage'." Meschonnic uses the reference to make a good point about the intelligent use orality in translations for the theater, yet he has nothing but disdain for the low-level correspondences that operate on the level of grammatical obligation. That whole argument was a long way beneath him.

As Bourdieu (1979/1984) remarked of (French) cultural practices in general, the chief import of all these non-arguments is to set up and manipulate a distinction between

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[7] In a later study, Folkart relates Laugier to Venuti's toying with Italianized prepositions and notes that "it is considered good form to tout the virtues of translating close to the grain" (2007: 291). She suggests that this may be due to a "colossal misunderstanding of Berman's central concept, 'la lettre'" (292), which is quite possible, although one doubts that Berman was the necessary authority for timid literary/philosophical literalism into English.

the different "tastes" of social classes, mostly between a superior "us" and an inferior "them." Those cultural distinctions become self-justifying, functioning so as to legitimize social distinctions, over and above the distributions of wealth or political authority. Something like that is happening here, in the various appeals to self-evidence.

Could there ever be a definitive argument in favor of one kind of solution or another? Probably not, or at least not in terms of the values discussed here. Elsewhere (Pym 2000) I have described the history of translation principles as a constant negotiation process in which there are moments of relatively stable hierarchies ("regimes") but no lasting victories: a principle that is almost forgotten in one age or culture might become key in another. The reluctance to engage in debate, however, the simple assumption of self-evident superiority, risks having precisely the opposite effect: once others begin to doubt your axiomatic superiority, they will have no substantial reason to mimick your translation preferences. As the prestige and protagonism of French culture has declined on the international stage, many of those who have cited and adapted Vinay and Darbelnet have blissfully overlooked the strong ideologies that framed the initial formulation of their solution types. The solution types proved useful, but the ideology had no strong reason to travel.

The comparative study of solution types should initially be interested in the possibility that each typology is determined not just by the languages it draws examples from, but more profoundly by the culturally specific *political ideologies* about those languages, especially about their relative prestige and relations of power. In this particular case, the ideological component would seem to be particularly marked; it raises the question of whether the apparently technical categories really *can* be separated, not just from specific languages, but also from historical prejudices.

Still on the road?

The remaining question is obvious: If Vinay and Darbelnet were so locked into a specifically colonial ideology, formulated in a context ideologically ruled by two master languages considered equal in strength and resources, how is it that their typology of solution types has been used by scholars all over the word for more than fifty years? How could the terms have been repeated so easily and so frequently for many other language pairs? Surely the categories themselves could not have been all that bad? Perhaps the French linguists had really glimpsed an eternal truth of translation? Or have generations of translation scholars been so lacking in critical insight that they have simply accepted and repeated erroneous but accumulative authority?

Comparison with the many rival lists (wait for Pym forthcoming) has no trouble questioning the intrinsic values of Vinay and Darbelnet: their typology strangely has no category for purely syntactic changes (which the Russian and German traditions called "permutation"); the same examples are given for different categories; students struggle to distinguish between "transposition", "modulation" and "adaptation", and, as mentioned, the nature of "equivalents" was never really explained. Yet the categories are not entirely without validity – at the end of the day, this is a problem for which there are essentially no correct answers (it is like identifying colors in a rainbow continuum), and any metalanguage will probably do as long as it enables people to talk.

But what of the politics? Have they magically been washed out in the course of fifty years? Possibly so. As Translation Studies has become an academic discipline, as scholars cite scholars without reference to the contexts in which the initial ideas were produced, the collective illusion is indeed one of ideological neutrality, of simple description, of the naming of self-evident things. The problem is not so much that Vinay and Darbelnet's ideologies are now, for many of us, outdated and ultimately reprehensible. It is more that the political work of their categories has been concealed, buried beneath apparent technicalities.

And yet some of the activism might still speak. When Vinay and Darbelnet warn that the prose of international organizations might become "slop for cats" (1958/1972: 54), in any of its variants, the criticism is probably more valid now than it was in the late 1950s. It now concerns not just the anodyne bureaucratic translations that give correct information and zero aspiration, but also the non-translations, the official prose, written *for* translation and thus sounding like translations. The urgent ideological problem is no longer the need to protect the *génie* of any particular language; it is a matter of encouraging citizens to be involved in supra-national politics, especially in Europe. And for this, we need texts, be they translations or otherwise, that are minimally exciting to read and can very ideally motivate action, over and above the democratic duty to provide information. In this respect, the more adventurous of Vinay and Darbelnet's strategies meet up with calls for translations to act as events in themselves (Pym 2012: 122-123; Venuti 2012: 184-186), and with other similarly-minded calls for translators to have more courage when making decisions (Nord 2014). Isolated old solutions can indeed prove useful when applied to new problems, and need not be thrown out with the distasteful politics of their birth – as long as we are aware of the contexts in which we are working now, and where our apparently transparent words came from.

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