MARGHERITA ULRYCH

TRANSLATING TEXTS

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

CIDEB
EDITRICE

Editor: Franco Monteverdi

Design and cover: Nadia Maestri

To Piero

First edition: September 1992

5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 88-7754-070 2

Printed in Italy by Litoprint, Genoa

CONTENTS

"The limits of my language are the limits of my world."

Wittgenstein

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in translation studies have signalled a trend towards a process-oriented approach that merges formal and functional aspects of communication. This new approach reflects research carried out in such areas as sociolinguistics, textlinguistics, discourse analysis, speech act theory, and the ethnography of communication. There is, moreover, an ever-increasing interest in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies, an offshoot of broader international cooperation. The realisation that language communities are not closed worlds and that the limits of one's language are indeed the limits of one's world, as Wittgenstein remarked, has given rise to renewed fervour in potentiating cross-cultural communication.

There are two fundamental ways in which people expressing themselves in a different language can communicate: either by drawing on linguistic competence, learning other languages, that is; or by calling on the services of a translator if the words to be communicated are written or an interpreter if oral. Nowadays, translation is the principal means of surmounting the language barrier and of enabling communication to take place effectively and efficiently between individuals and organisations using different languages. In this sense, translation goes a long way towards developing intercultural communication skills and cross-cultural awareness as well as understanding between nations. It can almost be said to be a pre-condition for the creation and the development of political, commercial, scientific, cultural, and social relations between nations.

Translation is, besides, the ideal activity for monitoring how and to what extent communication can effectively occur between languages and across cultural boundaries. Successful communication depends not only on formal linguistic features but also on the contextual facts outside language, and these are not only based on world knowledge but are often culture specific. This involves understanding how information is produced and processed in the L1 and L2 as well as making hypotheses about the knowledge which may

or may not be shared by the sender and receiver of a message as members of different cultures. Language is therefore seen not as an isolated, abstract phenomenon but as dynamic interaction and transaction that takes place between participants in a given social and cultural framework. And the process of translation is no longer considered a mechanical substitution of discrete grammatical or lexical items from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) in a vacuum, but enjoys full status as a cross-cultural communicative activity.

Current linguistic theories have also done away with the idea that translation is concerned with isolated words, phrases or sentences or that it is a problem of non-correspondence of certain formal (lexical or grammatical) categories in different languages. Meaning across languages is encoded at text level and negotiated beyond the surface level. As a result, the teaching of translation is now based on the relationship of language elements within the larger context of text, situation and culture. This in turn has meant that texts to be translated are approached on a series of overlapping levels, from the socio-cultural and functional to the structural. In other words, the source text (ST) is first evaluated in relation to its cultural and social context; its communicative function is then identified and its structure is finally analysed, starting from the larger textual elements down to the grammatical and lexical items.

Seen in this light, the process of translation comprises syntactic, semantic and pragmatic components. Syntax has to do with the formal side of language, while semantics covers the content side. However, since language is subject to influence from outside factors (the context of situation and the context of culture), it also comes under the realm of pragmatics. Pragmatics refers to the purposes for which language is used and to judgements about what a translation seeks to achieve, judgements, that is, about the intended meaning of the ST writer's message in context. Meaning can thus be semantic or pragmatic: semantic meaning refers to fixed context-free meaning, whereas pragmatic meaning is the meaning language takes on in a specific context between specific people. Translating texts involves questions of grammatical acceptability, questions of meaning, questions of acceptability in context and has much to do with their pragmatic role as utterances which relate specifically to the encoder's and the decoder's participation in the act of communication.

A translation course should therefore aim to encourage learners not only to explore the linguistic similarities and differences between their L1 and L2 but also to interpret the socially-conditioned aspects that lie behind the surface meaning of the text. The meaning of a text cannot be limited to the sense of individual words but is to be looked for in what the text intends to achieve, what function is intended in that particular context. Attention should therefore be focused on the interaction between grammar and other factors in the totality of linguistic communication and not on language as a system.

The ultimate goal of trainee translators is to acquire the translation skills that will enable them to translate texts from various discourse areas to a satisfactory degree of communicative equivalence and competence. This is, of course, no simple task since translating demands a fairly high level of language proficiency in both L1 and L2. Yet being proficient in two or more languages, or even being bilingual, is not sufficient in itself for successful translation. An important component of learning to translate is receiving explicit instruction about what it means to translate. Being able to call upon cognitive as well as linguistic skills will stand trainee translators in good stead when faced with any type of translation or at least to be aware of the difficulties involved. They will be able to relate the information and strategies they have acquired as regards one particular text to other discourse areas as they cannot possibly have practice in every problem area they might encounter. Most specialised exams for translators now include an annotated translation examination into the L1 specifically to test whether students have internalised basic translation principles. "Knowing how" to translate therefore entails developing an awareness of the whys and wherefores of translation. Just as knowledge about language leads to awareness of language, which in turn leads to increased efficiency and sensitivity to language, so familiarity with translation theory leads to enhanced performance. Most of all translation theory should teach them that there is no *one* single way to translate all kinds of texts.

This leads on to another important issue in translation theory and practice: the quality of a translation. Translation quality depends on three interacting factors. Firstly, the text type: we can no longer speak in terms of literary translation versus "other" types of translation, traditionally scientific or technical. All are now seen in terms of text-types or discourse genres on a cline, each with a predominant function that requires specific treatment according to certain basic principles. Secondly, the socio-cultural context that surrounds the need to translate: this may be client-based in that someone commissions a translation; it may be based on market-demands, as in the case of a publisher who perceives the desirability of translating a foreign text; or it may be translator-driven because someone feels he or she has a new contribution to offer, like re-translating a classic. Thirdly, the translation standard required: the quality of a translation is not always first-rate as very much depends on the use that is to be made of the text in question. Raw machine translations, with no or minimal intervention by a human translator, are at times deemed fully acceptable texts.

These factors have important implications for translation practice, since they will largely determine who translates what. A literary text by an authoritative writer, commissioned by a leading publisher, where quality is a deciding factor, will obviously be best tackled by

translators working into their mother tongue. At the other extreme, a working proposal or report for internal reference and informational purposes will most likely be translated into the L2 by an in-service translator. The effectiveness and adequacy of a translation can thus only be judged in terms of the translation task to be performed and in terms of users' needs.

Whichever way translators work, whether it is primarily into their L1 or their L2, they still require the necessary linguistic and cognitive skills as well as explicit training. This includes expertise in connected skills, like reading, writing, text analysis and stylistic analysis. Ideally, a translator should also have a working knowledge of the subject-matter to be translated (economics, medicine, law, philosophy, and so on). Learning to translate may be seen as a cyclical process: translation requires translators to be fairly proficient in integrated L1 and L2 skills but, in turn, consolidates and enhances linguistic and cognitive competence.

The main aim of *Translating Texts: from Theory to Practice* is to provide intermediate and advanced trainee translators and language students with the rationale that lies behind the translation process so that they will be able to tackle all text-types. Translation is, however, seen not only as an end in itself but also as a useful and effective means of sensitizing learners to the way information is handled in discourse across languages and across cultures. Each chapter deals with a specific aspect of translation from both a theoretical and a practical perspective.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of traditional and current issues central to translation. It also examines the changing role of the translator and prospects for the future.

The pragmatic aspects of translation are introduced in Chapter 2, which investigates how language forms and functions interact within and across language boundaries. It focuses on the appropriateness of the linguistic form to the function of the utterance in relation to the addresser's intentions and underlying communicative motivations. Translation is defined in terms of a verbal act or performance, the transfer of a *message* expressed in the ST into a message expressed in the TT. Maximization of pragmatic equivalence between ST and TT depends on the translator's ability to identify the predominant language function and thus the text-type. The function may be referential, focusing on information for its own sake; emotive, centred on the sender of the message; conative, centred on the recipient; poetic, centred on the form; metalingual, centred on the code; or, phatic, centred on establishing and maintaining contact between participants in the speech act.

The importance of pragmatics to translation is further explored in Chapter 3, which stresses the need to interpret the ST as an integral part of its socio-cultural context in terms of both the context of situation and the context of culture. Such variants of communication as participants, their shared background knowledge, and the relationship of meaning to the extralinguistic environment and its appropriateness to the speech situation are discussed in detail.

Chapter 4 reviews the ways writers use language to achieve stylistic effects in a variety of text-types and offers practical advice on how to handle stylistic choice when translating. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 deal specifically with co-textual features of translation: the way discourse is constructed within and beyond sentence boundaries to produce a unified and meaningful text. Textual organisation, in terms of thematisation, information focus, sentence structure, punctuation, tense and aspect, is covered in Chapter 5, while Chapters 6 and 7 deal respectively with grammatical and lexical cohesive devices: reference items, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, and lexical organisation.

The various aspects of translation discussed in these chapters are drawn together in Chapter 8, which offers guidance on the actual translation process. Translation is seen as a problem-solving activity which stimulates learners to build up their self-confidence and powers of reasoning.

Sample translations with detailed comments are provided in Chapter 9. Suggestions are made on how best to cope with the problems that present themselves at various language levels with specific reference to translating texts from Italian into English.

Authentic texts covering a variety of discourse types, including politics, psychology, literature and the arts, history, sociology, economics, medicine, the environment and current affairs, are included in Chapter 10 for further practice.

Each chapter contains a further reading section and a comprehensive list of references is given at the end of the book.

Translating Texts: from Theory to Practice can be used either as a course book, or as a self study guide. It is intended both for trainee translators and for students for whom translation is an integral part of their language course. Although mainly restricted to the classroom environment, translating can still be envisaged as a concrete, practical activity within a sociolinguistic context and can include practice in the kind of language use that will be needed when undertaken professionally. Translating is thus a useful and effective means of sensitizing learners to the way information is handled in discourse across languages and across cultures since it tests cross-cultural communicative competence, both linguistic and cognitive, to the utmost. The guiding principle underlying the book is that translation *can* be taught. The acquisition of translation skills should, however, be approached objectively and analytically through the study and practice of structural, functional, and socio-cultural aspects and, above all, as a personal and satisfying experience.

References

Cecioni, C.G. and Cheselka, C. (Eds.) 1990. *The Teaching of Foreign Languages in European Universities.* Firenze: Centro Linguistico di Ateneo.

Keith, H. and Mason, I. (Eds.) 1987. *Translation in the Modern Languages Degree.* London: CILT.

Serpieri, A. 1988. "Libertà e vincolo nel tradurre Shakespeare: per una teoria della traduzione drammatica" in Elizabeth Glass et al. (Eds.), *Traduzione / Tradizioni. Spessore del concetto di contemporaneità.* Pescara: CLUA.

Van Slype, G., Guinet, J.F., Seitz, F. and Benejam, E. 1983. *Better Translation for Better Communication.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Abbreviations

SL	Source Language
TL	Target Language
ST	Source Text
TT	Target Text

CHAPTER 1

Translation Issues: Past, Present and Future

One of the longest standing issues in translation studies has been how "faithful" the translator should be to the original text. This dilemma has been put forward at various times in history as a series of dichotomies: word vs sense, literal vs free, faithful vs free, form vs content, pedagogic translation vs imitation, and more recently, formal vs dynamic and semantic vs communicative translation. Savory (1968:50) lists a whole series of conflicting guidelines for the translator, which seem to imply that translation is to a great extent an exercise in relativity:

1 A translation must give the words of the original.
2 A translation must give the ideas of the original.
3 A translation should read like an original work.
4 A translation should read like a translation.
5 A translation should reflect the style of the original.
6 A translation should possess the style of the translator.
7 A translation should read as a contemporary of the original.
8 A translation should read as a contemporary of the translator.
9 A translation may add to or omit from the original.
10 A translation may never add to or omit from the original.
11 A translation of verse should be in prose.
12 A translation of verse should be in verse.

As we shall see, most if not all of these criteria may in fact be applicable depending on the type of text the translator is faced with. Preference for one or other of these principles has, however, also changed over the centuries as generations and literary movements have followed on from one another.

1.1. Issues in the Past

The word vs sense controversy raged for hundreds of years with various eminent writers and thinkers taking one side or another. The basic issue was how much latitude a translator could exercise when representing the ST in translation. In other words, what length should the unit of text to be translated at any one time be: should it be each individual word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph or the entire text? At one end of the spectrum there was word-for-word translation: the unit of translation was the word, or at most, the individual phrase or sentence. This type of approach focused very much on the ST and was SL-oriented. There was, moreover, a direct and transparent relation between ST and TT. At the other end, there was imitation. The relation of the TT to the ST was indirect and complex and there was no recognisable unit of translation. The ST served merely as a model and was generally discernible in the TT only in an allusive or connotative way. The focus was obviously on the TT and the approach was TL-oriented. In between were various degrees of "faithfulness" to the original and deviation from it. Generally speaking, the factors which influenced the stand that was taken by writers and translation theorists were historical, literary and religious.

Cicero in the 1st century BC was the first to speak in favour of translating *ad sensum* rather than *ad verbum*. Horace some twenty years later advised the translator to "be faithful to the meaning of the sentence, not to the word order" (G. Steiner 1975:263). Both privileged SL content over form. In the Middle Ages it was word-for-word translation that was most widely practised, however, especially with regard to sacred texts. Words were written in over the original text in a kind of "interlinear" translation. The reasoning behind this approach to translation was that the order of words was divinely ordained and therefore had to be respected in the translated version as closely as possible. It did not matter that the translated text was not always immediately intelligible since the text was a sacred mystery in itself. The degree of intelligibility therefore depended greatly on syntactical similarity between SL and TL.

The aim of two famous Bible translators, St. Jerome and Martin Luther, was, on the other hand, to produce a vernacular version that was both readable and aesthetically satisfying to their TL readers. This meant changing the word order of the original to one that was suited to the TL. The meaning of phrases and sentences was expressed without regard for word-for-word correspondence so that style and sense privileged over form. The translator decided what the sense of a phrase or sentence was and then rendered it appropriately in the TL. Martin Luther went as far as to use the term to "Germanize" as an

equivalent for the way he translated the Bible. In his *Ein Sendbrief von Dolmetzchen* he insists that it is the sense of the SL that should be translated and that his rendering in German was based on the way people speak in the market place. In other words, he felt that as the Bible was destined for ordinary people it was to be translated into a language they could understand and not remain an inscrutable mystery on the grounds that it was a sacred text. The focus as far as he was concerned was on a natural rendering rather than a literal one (faithful to the sense rather than to the word). Luther's translation of the Bible, like other 16th century Protestant versions, were audience-oriented: the language was vulgarised in order to make it comprehensible to its destined readers. It is important to realise, however, that Luther believed that he had been divinely inspired to understand the key to the meaning of the Bible and that he was in a position to interpret the sacred text for others. The concept of "interpretation" is an important one since it is closely bound up with the role of the translator and the techniques of translation to be used. This has also changed with time, as we shall see later.

One of the first theories of translation was formulated in 1540 by a French scholar, Etienne Dolet. His four-page treatise entitled *La manière de bien traduire d'une langue en autre* established five basic guidelines for the translator:

1 understand fully the sense and content (subject-matter) of the original text.
2 have a perfect knowledge of both the SL and TL.
3 avoid translating word-for-word: that is, be faithful to the meaning of the sentences and not to the word order.
4 use a form of plain every day speech and avoid borrowing foreign words from the SL or coining neologisms.
5 use a harmonious and natural style which is pleasing to the TL reader's ear and intellect.

In some places he merely echoes Cicero and Horace, in others he is quite innovative and, perhaps for the first time, expresses criteria that still hold true today. Dolet encouraged the translator to clarify any obscure expressions in the original and to render the author's "intention" rather than the words themselves.

In their emphasis on artistic quality rather than on mere words and phrases, Dolet, as well as others of his time were relatively sophisticated in their conception of translation. Joachim du Bellay, a contemporary of Dolet's, saw the relation between the translation and its source as a kind of transformation and suggested that French poets should imitate the best Greek writers by "devouring them and, having digested them well, convert them into blood and nourishment". He believed that only imitation could recreate the "genius" or "spirit" of a poet in another language.

One of the longest standing issues in translation studies has been how "faithful" the translator should be to the original text. This dilemma has been put forward at various times in history as a series of dichotomies: word vs sense, literal vs free, faithful vs free, form vs content, pedagogic translation vs imitation, and more recently, formal vs dynamic and semantic vs communicative translation. Savory (1968:50) lists a whole series of conflicting guidelines for the translator, which seem to imply that translation is to a great extent an exercise in relativity:

1 A translation must give the words of the original.
2 A translation must give the ideas of the original.
3 A translation should read like an original work.
4 A translation should read like a translation.
5 A translation should reflect the style of the original.
6 A translation should possess the style of the translator.
7 A translation should read as a contemporary of the original.
8 A translation should read as a contemporary of the translator.
9 A translation may add to or omit from the original.
10 A translation may never add to or omit from the original.
11 A translation of verse should be in prose.
12 A translation of verse should be in verse.

As we shall see, most if not all of these criteria may in fact be applicable depending on the type of text the translator is faced with. Preference for one or other of these principles has, however, also changed over the centuries as generations and literary movements have followed on from one another.