1960s–1970s

THE CONTROLLING CONCEPT for most translation theory during these decades is equivalence. Translating is generally seen as a process of communicating the foreign text by establishing a relationship of identity or analogy with it. In 1963 Georges Mounin argues that equivalence is based on "universals" of language and culture, questioning the notions of relativity that in previous decades made translation seem impossible. At the same time, the literature on equivalence is fundamentally normative, aiming to provide not only analytical tools to describe translations, but also standards to evaluate them. The universal is then shaped to a local situation.

Theorists tend to assume that the foreign text is a fairly stable object, possessing invariants, capable of reduction to precisely defined units, levels, and categories of language and textuality. Equivalence is submitted to lexical, grammatical, and stylistic analysis; it is established on the basis of text type and social function. By the end of the 1970s, so many typologies of equivalence have been devised that Werner Koller can offer a nuanced summary of the possibilities. Equivalence, he writes, may be "denotative," depending on an "invariance of content"; "connotative," depending on similarities of register, dialect, and style; "text-normative," based on "usage norms" for particular text types; and "pragmatic," ensuring comprehensibility in the receiving culture (Koller 1979:186–91; Koller 1989:99–104).

The most familiar theoretical move in this period is to draw an opposition between translating that cultivates pragmatic equivalence, immediately intelligible to the receptor, and translating that is formally equivalent, designed to approximate the linguistic and cultural features of the foreign text. In his widely cited 1964 book (excerpted below), **Eugene Nida** distinguishes between "dynamic" and "formal" varieties of "correspondence," later replacing the term "dynamic" with "functional" (Nida and Taber 1969). The year 1977 sees the first appearance of similar oppositions

from Peter Newmark ("communicative" and "semantic") and Juliane House ("covert" and "overt"). House's distinction contains the added refinement of considering how much the foreign text depends on its own culture for intelligibility. If the significance of a foreign text is peculiarly indigenous, it requires a translation that is overt or noticeable through its reliance on supplementary information, whether in the form of expansions, insertions or annotations.

These varying sets of terms derive from traditional dichotomies between "sense-for-sense" and "word-for-word" translating which date back to antiquity, to Horace, Jerome, Augustine. But now they are informed by the ascendancy and sheer proliferation of linguistics-oriented approaches in translation research. The binary oppositions are basically synonymous, despite the variations among the terms. They are not quite identical, however, since each pair emphasizes different translation aims and effects. Pragmatic equivalence communicates the foreign text according to values so familiar in the receiving language and culture as to conceal the very fact of translation. Formal equivalence, in contrast, adheres so closely to the linguistic and cultural values of the foreign text as to reveal the translation to be a translation.

Translation theories that privilege equivalence must inevitably come to terms with the existence of "shifts" between the foreign and translated texts, deviations that can occur in several linguistic levels and categories. **J.C.Catford**'s 1965 study (excerpted below) offers a precise description of grammatical and lexical shifts, as well as "departures from formal correspondence."

Instead of raising fundamental doubts about the possibility of equivalence, shifts are used to recommend translating that is pragmatic, functional, communicative. When Anton Popovič asserts that "shifts do not occur because the translator wishes to 'change' a work, but because he strives to reproduce it as faithfully as possible," the kind of "faithfulness" he has in mind is "functional," with the translator locating "suitable equivalents in the *milieu* of his time and society" (Popovič 1970:80, 82).

In the essay reprinted here, **Jiří Levý** cites experiments to show that pragmatic translation involves a "gradual semantic shifting" as translators choose from a number of possible solutions. Modern translators, he asserts, intuitively apply the "minimax strategy," choosing the solution "which promises a maximum of effect with a minimum of effort"—short of violating the "linguistic or aesthetic standards" of a particular readership. Elsewhere Levý is critical of the results: in an experiment designed to study the language of "average" and "bad" translations, he finds that shifts work to generalize and clarify meaning, "changing the style of a literary work into a dry and uninspiring description of things and actions" (Levý 1965:78–80).

Katharina Reiss (1971) presents a sophisticated typology that displays the logical tensions among the reigning concepts in the literature. As she argues in the essay reprinted here, the "functionally equivalent" translation needs to be based on a "detailed semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic analysis" of the foreign text. But the pragmatic analysis always risks revising any previous account of meaning because it redefines the object of analysis. The pragmatic translator doesn't simply analyze the linguistic and cultural features of the foreign text, but reverbalizes them according to the values of a different language and culture, often applying what House calls a "filter" to aid the receptor's comprehension of the differences.

The functionalism in so many translation theories at this time casts doubt on elaborate typologies of equivalence by suggesting that they are merely constructions, ideal schemes not realized in actual translations. Or, more precisely, the ideal becomes possible only within a narrow range of texts in specifie institutional situations, including translator training programs. Reiss, like so many of her contemporaries, developed her theory while training translators of "informative" texts. With official documents, scholarly articles, operation manuals, and news reports, it was assumed, the translator can choose linguistic forms that correspond directly to communicative functions, securing equivalence on the basis of reference to real objects, persons, and events. Translator training, moreover, creates a demand for analytical tools that can be used to generate translation strategies and solutions in the classroom.

In the case of literary texts, the functionalist trend ultimately displaces equivalence as a central concept in translation research by directing attention to the receptor. During the 1970s, **Itamar Even-Zohar** and **Gideon Toury** set out from the assumption that literary translations are facts of the target system. In key essays reprinted below in later revised versions, they theorize literature as a "polysystem" of interrelated forms and canons that constitute "norms" constraining the translator's choices and strategies.

Even-Zohar imagines the body of translated literature as a system in its own right, existing in varying relationships with original compositions. Both occupy "positions" in literary systems, whether "central" or "peripheral," and both perform literary "functions," whether "innovative" or "conservatory." A minor literature—minor in relation to longer and more richly developed literary traditions—may assign translation a central role in spurring innovation. In a major literature, translation may be assigned a peripheral role, conservatively adhering to norms rejected by original writing.

Toury shows how the target orientation transforms the concept of equivalence. The "adequacy" of a translation to the source text becomes an unproductive line of enquiry, not only because shifts always occur, but because any determination of adequacy, even the identification of a source text and a translation, involves the application of a target norm. Hence, Toury seeks to describe and explain the "acceptability" of the translation in the receiving culture, the ways in which various shifts constitute a type of equivalence that reflects target norms at a certain historical moment.

Polysystem theory proves to be a decisive advance in translation research. The literature on equivalence formulates linguistic and textual models and often prescribes a specific translation practice (pragmatic, functional, communicative). The target orientation, in contrast, focuses on actual translations and submits them to detailed description and explanation. It inspires research projects that involve substantial corpora of translated texts. A pioneering study of nineteenth-century French translations is conducted by Lieven D'hulst, José Lambert, and Katrin van Bragt.

The expansion of translation research in the 1960s and 1970s coincides with an increased awareness that it represents an emerging academic discipline. Early theorists like Catford feel that translation studies do not deserve the institutional autonomy of linguistics because they are a site, not of theorizing about language,

but of applying linguistic theories. When Nida and later Wolfram Wilss call their theoretical works a "science" of translation, they are giving the topic a scholarly coherence and legitimacy that it has so far lacked (Wilss 1977, 1982).

In the very influential paper included here (1972), **James Holmes** draws up a disciplinary map for translation studies, distinguishing "pure" research-oriented areas of translation theory and description from "applied" areas like translator training. The distinction between "pure" and "applied" shows that translation studies is taking over the scientific model from linguistics. And indeed the claim of scientific objectivity, coupled with the call for empirical data and the search for probabilistic laws of translation, recurs in target-oriented theorists like Even-Zohar and Toury, for whom Russian Formalism is more useful than functional linguistics. Nonetheless, translation theory remains a heterogeneous field throughout this period. It encompasses both linguists like Catford, whose study is underwritten by Hallidayan analytical concepts, and the eclectic Levý, who synthesizes psycholinguistics, semantics, structural anthropology, literary criticism, and game theory.

George Steiner's magisterial 1975 study *After Babel,* continuously in print for more than two decades, is undoubtedly the most widely known work in translation theory since the Second World War. It opposes modern linguistics with a literary and philosophical approach. Whereas linguistics-oriented theorists define translation as functional communication, Steiner returns to German Romanticism and the hermeneutic tradition to view translating as an interpretation of the foreign text that is at once profoundly sympathetic and violent, exploitive and ethically restorative. For Steiner, language is not instrumental in communicating meaning, but constitutive in individual usage," that resist interpretation and escape the universalizing concepts reconstructing it. And it is the individualistic aspects of language, "the privacies of of linguistics (Steiner 1975:205). Deepening Schleiermacher's recommendation that German translators signal the foreignness of the foreign text, Steiner argues that "great translation must carry with it the most precise sense possible of the resistant, of the barriers intact at the heart of understanding" (ibid.: 378).

Linguists like Mounin and Catford assume that universals bridge linguistic and cultural differences. "Translation equivalence," Catford asserts, "occurs when a SL [source-language] and a TL [target-language] text or item are relatable to (at least some of) the same features of substance," where "substance" can signify a relatively fixed range of linguistic features, levels and categories, as well as a potentially infinite series of cultural situations (Catford 1965:50). Yet as the excerpt below makes clear, Steiner is also prone to universalizing insofar as his theory of the "hermeneutic motion" threatens to transcend the specific historical moments that inflect every translation. Steiner's discussions of translated texts either focus on the theoretical concept he wants to illustrate or analyze and evaluate a translator's handling of stylistic features. His forte is literary criticism as the appreciation of personal style, which results in suggestive readings of noted translations, especially by poets and philosophers. Historical situations, however, recede behind the innovative performances that occur in them.

For Henri Meschonnic, the German tradition leads in a different direction: he mounts a critique of naturalizing translation for mystifying its appropriation of the

foreign text. "The current proposition," he writes, "according to which a translation should not *give the impression of being translated,*" masks a process of "annexation" wherein the translated text "transposes the so-called dominant ideology" under the "illusion of transparency" (Meschonnic 1973:308, my translation). Like Nietzsche and Vossler before him, Meschonnic is acutely aware of the "imperialism" of any translating that "tends to forget its history" (ibid.: 310). He argues for a more theoretically sophisticated translation practice that questions the main tendency in this period towards the pragmatic, the functional, the communicative.

Further reading

Fawcett 1997, Gentzler 1993, Hatim 1998, Hermans 1999, Kelly 1979, Ladmiral 1986, Lambert 1995, Larose 1989, Nord 1997, Pym 1995, 1997a and 1998, Snell-Hornby 1988 and 1990