

For a Clear Definition of the Discipline of Translation Studies, or Why the Earth is Not Flat

Florence Lautel-Ribstein
Université d'Artois, France

1. Introduction

Over the last thirty years in France, the word “traductology” has led to numerous and sometimes polemical publications. It is a *non-equivalent* equivalent of the expression “Translation Studies” that is supposed to completely cover this discipline. Its ambition is to reflect on translation practices and the associated theories they give rise to, as well as on the history of translation. The “traductology” commentary required at the competitive examinations for future teachers in French secondary schools has done little to improve things. In fact, it has rather gone against the research in the international community of translation specialists, because of a lack of clear definition of what “translation[al]ist” and “traductology” actually mean, as well as of both a real and official recognition of this discipline as an independent section within the framework of the CNU (The National Committee for Universities).

Indeed, the “traductology” commentary, which, for the sake of intellectual honesty, should perhaps be called by its real name, an exercise in applied linguistics, contradicts the scientific development of this field nationally and internationally, because of its isolation from all the disciplines that translation studies actually overlap. It has quite naturally made a great number of professional and university translators snigger, philosophers of language shrug their shoulders, made literature specialists sigh, and created feelings of embarrassment among numerous linguists, who usually prefer less sterile and more fruitful issues related to translational approaches. And, one must add, rightly so: for the earth is *not* flat. The dominant model for the “traductology” commentary by those who prepare for the competitive examinations is based on the use of dictionaries and manuals, and focuses on language acts only. It is also one that values directly or indirectly the dissociation of semantic processing *out of* context and pragmatic processing *in* context where, according to Pierre Cadiot (2010: 14), “the signification of a word is first the object of fixation and ‘referential’ as well as ‘ontological’ individuation, that assumes globally a certain atomism of meaning coupled to categories of entities – or objects – and syntactic configurations” (my translation)¹. This approach favours a type of “realism” and allows for a first fixed relationship between / perception / representation / conscience on the one hand, and language on the other. The well-known triangle for “designation, referencing and categorisation” outlined by Georges Kleiber (1999) allows us to point out that the lexicon is here understood as being, Cadiot (2010: 15) says, “a completed and prior synthesis, and reserves the examination of improperly adapted usages for the next stage, where secondary mechanisms related to derivation or inference intervene”(my translation)². If this is the basis for the teaching of translation to our students, well then, yes, the earth *is* flat. And flat will also be, *ipso facto*, the translations they will produce. Indeed a translation reveals quite a great deal and a lot more than one imagines: its coherence and its unity – or their absence – show the depth of reflection that

¹ “... la signification d'un mot fait d'abord l'objet d'une première fixation, d'une première individuation ‘référentielle’ et ‘ontologique’, assumant globalement un certain atomisme du sens couplé à des entités – ou objets – catégoriels et s'appuyant à des configurations (syntaxiques)”.

² “une synthèse achevée et préalable, et réserve l'examen d'emplois mal ajustés à un second temps, où interviennent des mécanismes secondaires de dérivation ou d'inférence”.

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has been problematized, the possible attachment to language acts alone, with disregard for discourse analysis or, on the contrary, the taking into account – especially for a literary text – of the process of subjectivation to the work in the source text following the critical positioning of the translator.

Need one be reminded that the aim of Translation Studies is to translate better and not simply to engage oneself *a posteriori* in a descriptive linguistic exercise of the act of translation? Never in the living memory of translation specialists has such an exercise improved a single translation by a student. The proof is in the undeniable quality of the translations of some students and their poor performance in the above-mentioned linguistic commentary or, *a contrario* (and especially), the quality performances of other students in the so-called “traductology” exercise, and their persistently mediocre translations in spite of years of preparation for the monolithic analysis of these “language acts”. It is high time, therefore, to turn away from the classical and mechanical sign theory (signifier / signified) and its avatars, and move towards more rewarding translational strategies that are often incompatible with the desire for over simplification of the discipline, even for the sake of pedagogical purposes.

Two points need to be clarified rapidly. They concern:

- the definition of the discipline and the expertise of those who are deemed to represent it;
- a larger and more structured basis of reflection on the translational approach taught at university.

2. What is “Traductology” or Translation Studies?

Forced marriages have never been a good thing. In France, the example of Translation Studies and Applied Linguistics is no exception. It has eliminated a good number of potential candidates from the field of translation research and continues to do so because of a certain confusion that reigns in this area.

Such a specialist is:

- a) a *practicing translator*: a practitioner is someone who has been involved in literary translations for a long time and who translates and publishes works whether in the literary or more specialised fields. A lecturer in translation is a person who sometimes has reluctantly accepted to give courses on the subject at his university, following the not so extinct belief that translation is simply an ancillary activity; s/he is not necessarily a translation specialist. Translating is a highly demanding activity. It is time-consuming, requires investment and immense modesty. Expertise in this domain can only (if ever) be achieved after dealing with those works that resist translation.
- b) a *translation theorist*, or at least someone who has meditated upon the relationship between language and reality, language and perception, the semiotic system and process and language, as well as the link between language theories and translation theories. In short, someone who explores the three fields of Translation Studies: the *pragmatical* (the study of translation practice); the *analytical* (the study of translations from a theoretical perspective on language); the *critical* (the study of discourse on translation). The theorist, who is aware of and draws from the debate between different specialities such as philosophy, linguistics, semiotics, literary criticism, sociology, psychology on the one side, and Translation Studies on the other side, remains nevertheless someone who sets the cornerstones for a theoretical approach arising from practice, and *not* the opposite. The translation process is so rich and complex that it becomes a virtual necessity to draw from all these fields in order to support its practice and discern the “theorems for translation” (to use the well-known title of a key work in translation theory) and not to artificially apply theory to practice.

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c) a *historian of translation*. We translate into a given culture that has its own values which nourish the horizon of expectancy for the translator and the reader of translations. The historian is also a researcher who contributes to this vast, demanding and necessary academic enterprise; in the French Sorbonne, under the supervision of Jean-Yves Masson and Yves Chevrel, with the publication of the *History of Translations into French* (Editions Verdier, 2012), such researchers have taken a critical, lucid look at themselves and have become aware of belonging to a sociolinguistic group at a given moment in the history of translation theory and practice. If we cannot translate as people did at the time of the *Belles Infidèles*, we still need to know why. Whether we decide to use rhyme or not when translating poetry, we still need to know the history of rhyme and the history of the translation of rhyme in order to make a choice.

d) a *specialist in the subject* s/he translates. A simple cliché? For literature specialists, knowledge not only of the work to be translated, but of *all* the writer's works, of the genre and the period when the text was created is an obvious necessity. But what is obvious is far from always being done. Let us just take a single example: the first page of *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf in its different translations. Here we notice that the phenomenological approach, underpinning the exploration of the observer's point of view, extends down to the rhythmic movements of the sentence. How many translators have taken into account this philosophical view of perception? How many of them make us relive and physically feel the movement of the waves through the ebb and flow of the phrasing?

Not everyone can be a translation[al]ist. Translation Studies are a complete and difficult discipline that requires the mastery of numerous specialities, a great deal of humility when faced with the complexity of the task, and a mind that is open to diverse intellectual horizons, with applied linguistics covering just a very small part of one of the possible sources for reflection in this field. A lack of interest in any area can have unfortunate consequences for the quality of the translations, but also for the teaching of the subject in our universities and therefore the training of students studying translation. Official recognition of this discipline and the work of the translators/translation[al]ists is overdue. Such recognition would be the right response. It would eliminate from the outset any amateurism in this area and allow future PhD students to be supervised by those academics who provide the appropriate guarantees.

3. Learning to translate not words, but points of access to the world

An exploration of the "meaning" compacted in a segment of discourse (morpheme, word, set phrase, sentence...) would need to be explained in advance in order to create a better framework for the understanding of the resolutely holistic or global nature of any linguistic product, and therefore of any translation. What translation practice teaches is the need for an analysis of discourse even before language acts. Indeed, we learn from the literary text that there is no possible realism with an ontology of meaning as a precondition. The pragmatics proposed in the eighties by Ray Jackendoff or Geoffrey Nunberg, from which a certain form of "traductology" evolved, still prevails. If it adapted the interpretation to the context, it always did so downstream, from a morpho-lexical, codified and conventional meaning. The appeal of inference came back to legitimize its first individuation, without taking into consideration its predicative, argumentative, discursive, figurative or polysemic destiny. The "signifier" remained the isomorphic correlate of the "signified", the *viaticum* of content, in the form of minimal units of meaning, substantial features, etc. The translator of literary texts is first to learn very quickly to separate himself/herself at all costs from any dogmatic desire to fix the meaning of words. Merleau-Ponty (1964:131-32) already emphasised in the following way that:

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the unequivocal meaning is only a part of the meaning of the word... there is always, somewhere beyond, a halo of meaning that manifests itself in new and unexpected directions, ... there is language working on itself that, even in the absence of other invitations, sets language off on another adventure, and makes an enigma of the meaning of the word itself? (my translation.)

The subsequent stage in this logic, and a particularly dangerous path to follow, is the one we enter in order to understand and translate figurative, metaphorical, analogical or fixed meanings as secondary, where any "signified" finds itself with a value that is commonly called "literal". When translating literature, there is no marginalization of phenomena such as metaphoricality, polysemy, etc. On the contrary, they tirelessly return to centre stage, as they are at the heart of the translation process. Similarly, we may doubt the ontological organization of words into grammatical categories, qualities, states, etc. The difference between substances and qualities or between entities of the first degree (and the second) forces the translator not to invest in organising semantic-notional fields with their logical links to describe the world of experience, but to rebound towards lesser known semantic horizons, to leave his/her mark on writing that reflects the discontinuous nature of semantic values, their fuzziness, or even their "slippy identity".

All of this leads to an apprehension of meaning, first of all as perception, and not as conceptualization and representation. Words refer back firstly to *qualities of presence*. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, meaning is first of all figurative and metaphorical. For Georges Gusdorf, they are *indices of value* (1992:12). In short, words have to be seen as access points to situational experiences rather than representational ones, or associated by the speaker of the text to values under construction or just being reshaped. Translation refers back to a second "world" under construction, an open work, and not the stacking up of isolable entities. In literary translations especially, notions of category, reference, naming actually appear very late in the semantic genesis. Cadot (2013: 30) speaks about a "hyletic skein (i. e. pure sensations), an aggregate of *affordances*, or again, *protopredications* covering et recovering the perceptual and discursive field of its presence" (my translation). Such an analysis fits in with a sort of methodology for translation that we can use by taking Merleau-Ponty's definition of perspective (1945: 380):

"I do not have a particular perspective, and then another, and between them a degree of understanding, but each perspective enters the other and, if we were to use the word synthesis, it would be a 'transitional synthesis'."

In literary translations, when the holist approach is applied to the principle of transposing values to access meaning, with a view to analysing the discourse, it has a twofold benefit: it enables an understanding of the literariness of the text in greater depth and prevents the translator from any attempt at a purely source-centred translation, given that the target text constructs and reconstructs itself from new clues in a perceptible network. In order to give a few examples of general principles for translation, we could also reflect on two *semiotic systems* that are more or less in line with the general translational approach we advocate:

a) *Polyphony*, the fact that discourse can be attributed to several voices, the speaker, the interlocutor, the narrator, the common voice, etc. Polyphony can cross

3 "La signification unitivoque n'est qu'une partie de la signification du mot... il y a toujours au-delà un halo de signification qui se manifeste dans des modes d'emploi nouveaux et inattendus, ... il y a une opération du langage sur le langage qui, même à défaut d'autres invitations, relance le langage dans une nouvelle histoire, et fait de la signification de mot, elle-même, une énigme."
4 "Je n'ai pas une perspective, puis une autre, et entre elles une liaison d'entendement, mais chaque perspective passe dans l'autre et, si l'on peut encore parler de synthèse, il s'agit d'une « synthèse de transition »."

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b) *Autonymy*, a characteristic whereby discourse has the ability to *show itself*, to present its own case.

In these two situations, we shall retain the principle (for targeteers in translation) of *discursive modulation, polysemic unbundling* working on the hermeneutic resources of the target language.

Textual semantics with its consequences for a translational approach based on discourse analysis is far from being the only possible basis for the teaching of Translation Studies. Alongside the theory of semantic forms by Cadiot and Visetti (2001), we have in semiotics, the theory of instances of enunciation by Jean-Claude Coquet (2007), who creates a continuum between language, world and being; or following the cognitivist approach, the theory of cognemes¹ by Didier Bottineau (2012), who highlights the role the signifier plays in the emergence of representations. All of these theories allow principles for translation to be constructed and express the great limitations of an approach based both on the fragmentation of the text into isolated units and an excessive attachment to one ontological layer of meaning. The absence of such theories in the teaching of Translation Studies could well lead back to fetishizing the source text through a series of words-concepts.

Galileo might disapprove.

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ON HUMAN AMBITION

The Living Image: Biographical Narratives in Presidential Campaigns

Anna Romagnuolo
Università della Tuscia, Viterbo

The purpose of this study is to highlight recurrent features in US presidential advertising campaigns, with a particular focus on TV electoral commercials and autobiographical films used at national conventions to extol the nominee's virtues and boost his popularity. The typical generic structure of presidential candidates' campaign stories, greatly exploiting family-life narratives and national myths, will be examined both in TV adverts and political films for their relevance to individual and collective self-representation.

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