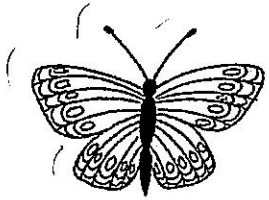
A : History:



HISTORY OF TRANSLATION THEORY

No introduction to Translation Studies could be complete without consideration of the discipline in an historical perspective, but the scope of such an enterprise is far too vast to be covered adequately in a single book, let alone in a single chapter. What can be done in the time and space allowed here is to look at the way in which certain basic *lines of approach* to translation have emerged at different periods of European and American culture and to consider how the role and function of translation has varied. So, for example, the distinction between *word for word* and *sense for sense* translation, established within the Roman system, has continued to be a point for debate in one way or another right up to the present, while the relationship between translation and emergent nationalism can shed light on the significance of differing concepts of culture. The persecution of Bible translators during the centuries when scholars were avidly translating and retranslating Classical Greek and Roman authors is an important link in the chain of the development of capitalism and the decline of feudalism. In the same way, the hermeneutic approach of the great English and German Romantic translators connects with changing concepts of the role of the individual in the social context. It cannot be emphasized too

strongly that the study of translation, especially in its diachronic aspect, is a vital part of literary and cultural history.

PROBLEMS OF 'PERIOD STUDY'

George Steiner, in *After Babel*,[1] divides the literature on the theory, practice and history of translation into four periods. The first, he claims, extends from the statements of Cicero and Horace on translation up to the publication of Alexander Fraser Tytler's *Essay on the Principles of Translation* in 1791. The central characteristic of this period is that of 'immediate empirical focus', i.e. the statements and theories about translation stem directly from the practical work of translating. Steiner's second period, which runs up to the publication of Larbaud's *Sous l'invocation de Saint Jérome* in 1946 is characterized as a period of theory and hermeneutic enquiry with the development of a vocabulary and methodology of approaching translation. The third period begins with the publication of the first papers on machine translation in the 1940s, and is characterized by the introduction of structural linguistics and communication theory into the study of translation. Steiner's fourth period, coexisting with the third, has its origins in the early 1960s and is characterized by 'a reversion to hermeneutic, almost metaphysical inquiries into translation and interpretation'; in short by a vision of translation that sets the discipline in a wide frame that includes a number of other disciplines:

> Classical philology and comparative literature, lexical statistics and ethnography, the sociology of class-speech, formal rhetoric, poetics, and the study of grammar are combined in an attempt to clarify the act of translation and the process of 'life between languages'.

Steiner's divisions, although interesting and perceptive, nevertheless illustrate the difficulty of studying translation diachronically, for his first period covers a span of some 1700 years while his last two periods cover a mere thirty years. Whilst his comments on recent developments in the discipline are very fair, it is also the case that the characteristic of his first period is equally apparent today in the body of work arising from the observations and polemics of the individual translator. His

quadripartite division is, to say the least, highly idiosyncratic, but it does manage to avoid one great pitfall: periodization, or compartmentalization of literary history. It is virtually impossible to divide periods according to dates for, as Lotman points out, human culture is a dynamic system. Attempts to locate stages of cultural development within strict temporal boundaries contradict that dynamism. A splendid example of the kind of difficulties that arise from the 'periodization approach' emerge when we consider the problem of defining the temporal limits of the Renaissance. There is a large body of literature that attempts to decide whether Petrarch and Chaucer were medieval or Renaissance writers, whether Rabelais was a medieval mind *post hoc*, or whether Dante was a Renaissance mind two centuries too soon. An examination of translation in those terms would not be very helpful at all.

Yet undoubtably there are certain concepts of translation that prevail at different times, which can be documented. T.R. Steiner[2] analyses English translation theory between the cut-off dates of 1650–1800, starting with Sir John Denham and ending with William Cowper, and examines the prevailing eighteenth-century concept of the translator as painter or imitator. André Lefevere[3] has compiled a collection of statements and documents on translation that traces the establishment of a German tradition of translation, starting with Luther and moving on via Gottsched and Goethe to the Schlegels and Schleiermacher and ultimately to Rosenzweig. A less systematic approach, but one which is still tied to a particular time frame, may be found in F.O. Matthiesson's analysis of four major English translators of the sixteenth century (Hoby, North, Florio and Philemon Holland),[4] whilst the methodology employed by Timothy Webb in his study of Shelley as translator[5] involves a careful analysis of the work of an individual translator in relation to the rest of his opus and to contemporary concepts of the role and status of translation.

Studies of this kind, then, that are not bound to rigid notions of period, but seek to investigate changing concepts of translation systematically, having regard to the system of signs that constitutes a given culture, are of great value to the student of Translation Studies. This is indeed a rich field for future research. All too often, however, studies of past translators and translations have focused more on the question

of influence; on the effect of the TL product in a given cultural context, rather than on the processes involved in the creation of that product and on the theory behind the creation: So, for example, in spite of a number of critical statements about the significance of translation in the development of the Roman literary canon, there has yet to be a systematic study of Roman translation theory in English. The claims summed up by Matthiesson when he declared that 'a study of Elizabethan translations is a study of the means by which the Renaissance came to England' are not backed by any scientific investigation of the same.

In trying to establish certain lines of approach to translation, across a time period that extends from Cicero to the present, it seems best to proceed by following a loosely chronological structure, but without making any attempt to set up clear-cut divisions. Hence, instead of trying to talk in what must inevitably be very general terms about a specifically 'Renaissance' or 'Classical' concept of translation, I have tried to follow lines of approach that may or may not be easily locatable in a temporal context. So the *word for word* v. *sense for sense* lines can be seen emerging again and again with different degrees of emphasis in accordance with differing concepts of language and communication. The purpose of a chapter such as this must be to raise questions rather than answer them, and to reveal areas in which further research might proceed rather than to pretend to be a definitive history.

THE ROMANS

Eric Jacobsen[6] claims rather sweepingly that translation is a Roman invention, and although this may be considered as a piece of critical hyperbole, it does serve as a starting point from which to focus attention on the role and status of translation for the Romans. The views of both Cicero and Horace on translation were to have great influence on successive generations of translators, and both discuss translation within the wider context of the two main functions of the poet: the universal human duty of acquiring and disseminating wisdom and the special art of making and shaping a poem.

The significance of translation in Roman literature has often been used to accuse the Romans of being unable to create imaginative

literature in their own right, at least until the first century BC. Stress has been laid on the creative imagination of the Greeks as opposed to the more practical Roman mind, and the Roman exaltation of their Greek models has been seen as evidence of their lack of originality. But the implied value judgement in such a generalization is quite wrong. The Romans perceived themselves as a continuation of their Greek models and Roman literary critics discussed Greek texts without seeing the language of those texts as being in any way an inhibiting factor. The Roman literary system sets up a hierarchy of texts and authors that overrides linguistic boundaries and that system in turn reflects the Roman ideal of the hierarchical yet caring central state based on the true law of Reason. Cicero points out that mind dominates the body as a king rules over his subjects or a father controls his children, but warns that where Reason dominates as a master ruling his slaves, 'it keeps them down and crushes them'.[7] With translation, the ideal SL text is there to be imitated and not to be crushed by the too rigid application of Reason. Cicero nicely expresses this distinction: 'If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator.'[8]

Both Horace and Cicero, in their remarks on translation, make an important distinction between *word for word* translation and *sense for sense* (or *figure for figure*) translation. The underlying principle of enriching their native language and literature through translation leads to a stress on the aesthetic criteria of the TL product rather than on more rigid notions of 'fidelity'. Horace, in his *Art of Poetry*, warns against overcautious imitation of the source model:

> A theme that is familiar can be made your own property so long as you do not waste your time on a hackneyed treatment; nor should you try to render your original word for word like a slavish translator, or in imitating another writer plunge yourself into difficulties from which shame, or the rules you have laid down for yourself, prevent you from extricating yourself.[9]

Since the process of the enrichment of the literary system is an integral part of the Roman concept of translation, it is not surprising to find a concern with the question of language enrichment also. So prevalent was the habit of borrowing or coining words, that Horace, whilst advising the would-be writer to avoid the pitfalls that beset 'the slavish translator', also advised the sparing use of new words. He compared the process of the addition of new words and the decline of other words to the changing of the leaves in spring and autumn, seeing this process of enrichment through translation as both natural and desirable, *provided* the writer exercised moderation. The art of the translator, for Horace and Cicero, then, consisted in judicious interpretation of the SL text so as to produce a TL version based on the principle *non verbum de verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu* (of expressing not word for word, but sense for sense), and his responsibility was to the TL readers.

But there is also an additional dimension to the Roman concept of enrichment through translation, i.e. the pre-eminence of Greek as the language of culture and the ability of educated Romans to read texts in the SL. When these factors are taken into account, then the position both of translator and reader alters. The Roman reader was generally able to consider the translation as a metatext in relation to the original. The translated text was read *through* the source text, in contrast to the way in which a monolingual reader can only approach the SL text through the TL version. For Roman translators, the task of transferring a text from language to language could be perceived as an exercise in comparative stylistics, since they were freed from the exigencies of having to 'make known' either the form or the content *per se*, and consequently did not need to subordinate themselves to the frame of the original. The good translator, therefore, presupposed the reader's acquaintance with the SL text and was bound by that knowledge, for any assessment of his skill as translator would be based on the creative use he was able to make of his model. Longinus, in his *Essay On the Sublime*,[10] cites 'imitation and emulation of the great historians and poets of the past' as one of the paths towards the sublime and translation is one aspect of imitation in the Roman concept of literary production.

Roman translation may therefore be perceived as unique in that it arises from a vision of literary production that follows an established canon of excellence across linguistic boundaries. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that with the extension of the Roman Empire,