

A Handbook of Translation

Introduction

1. A short history of contemporary translation studies

1.1. A new interest for translation;

Translation Studies has known in the last 40 years an important development. We can mention the first studies in a structuralist context (Jakobson 1959) or in the framework of information theory (Bar Hillel 1966) and the pioneer volumes of Mounin (1963), Catford (1965), Kade (1968). We can also remember the foundational work of Eugene Nida in Bible translation. After the Seventies, however there was a real explosion of research that has enriched the debate. Among the most known researchers we think of James Holmes (1988), Itamar Even-Zohar (1990), Gideon Toury (1980, 1985, 1995), André Lefevere (1992a), José Lambert (Lambert e van Gorp 1985), Susan Bassnett (1991a), Mary Snell-Hornby (1988) e Theo Hermans (1985), Lawrence Venuti (1995; 1998). All these scholars are oriented toward integrating from different perspectives Literary and Comparative Theory, Cultural Studies, Psychoanalysis, and Semiotics in the area of translation.

1.2. The linguistic approach;

From a linguistic point of view, translation has been considered above all a formal problem, limited essentially to the structure of languages. The goal from this perspective is to find the correspondences between languages and solve differences. In this context the main problem is to understand what is a good translation by analyzing the questions connected to fidelity and correctness.

1.3. Translating texts;

The beginning of Seventies in Linguistics meant the passage from sentence to text analysis and this had consequences also in translation. From this perspective we can find the work of Katharina Reiss (1976), who tried to build a typological framework used to evaluate translation. These ideas have been stressed in a later work written in collaboration with Hans J. Vermeer (Reiss-Vermeer 1984), in which the two authors assert that between source text and target text it is necessary to find a sort of intertextual coherence which is the real translation fidelity. What is characteristic of this position is that the concept of equivalence is intended as a concept that has different levels. So, more than try to find an equivalence that is difficult to define, it is important to conceive translation as an attempt to put into dialogue two texts by identifying functions and text types.

1.4 Manipulating and rewriting;

The repudiation of a normative attitude has characterized also the more recent tradition of Translation Studies. This is a research area in translation whose beginning is conventionally fixed in August 1972 when the translator James S. Holmes read a paper titled “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies”, at the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics of Copenhagen (Holmes 1972, 1988: 67–80, also in Toury 1995: 9ss). In that situation Holmes proposed a new discipline for the study of translation that refused on one hand the theories that reflected simply the attitude of the writer and on the other hand an abstract science of translation.

1.5. Translation and culture;

Translating means to adopt strategies that are from time to time different. This induced André Lefevere to speak explicitly of translation as rewriting. To translate is to rewrite because translation has a lot of things in common with other kinds of interpretation and textual production, as historiography, literary criticism, and editing. All these activities, in fact, have the goal to build an image of a text, of an author or of an entire literary culture and to project them in a different reception environment. **The history of translation, and for example the history of Bible translation, is precisely the history of a community in relation with others.** In this sense, to rewrite is to rethink a text in relation with its own cultural coordinates.

1.6. Transdisciplinarity;

Transdisciplinarity, is not intended as the creation of relations between closed disciplines, but rather as the attempt to open them up to find what they have in common and is above them. Such a perspective implies that there is no single logic or single level that by itself is sufficient to explain the world’s complexity, and that research cannot be inscribed in one discipline, with one defined object and method. Translation in this sense is a “nomadic concept” as those conceived exactly in the transdisciplinarity. Epistemologically this transdisciplinarity signals a change, since it is not the disciplines that decide how to analyze their objects of research, but the objects themselves that ask for certain instruments, neither inside nor outside the academic boundaries of the disciplines, but “above” them.

In this epistemological sphere it becomes less important to distinguish and define clearly what translation is and what it is not, what stands inside the borders of translation and what stands outside.

This also has to do with the general sense of limitation we today register in any categorical, but also hierarchical, dichotomous division between self and other, true and false, original and translation,

inside and outside, feminine and masculine, pretending them to be natural. From queer theory, as well as border studies, and more in general poststructuralist thinking, we have learned that these divisions are constructed and that there are many texts, identities and cultures that move in between, and on the edges.

2. A decalogue for a critical translator

2.1. What are we talking about when we talk of translation?

All the textual and language disciplines have long accepted that texts and signs work through the interpretative cooperation of receivers. Interpretation doesn't discriminate between form and content. Consequently it is a pure illusion to hope that it is possible to drop off a meaning and that the form, intended as a recipient, is used to deliver it. In the same way it is a pure illusion to think that the addressee (or someone that the addresser didn't forecast) can get back the meaning simply opening the "form" as we open a parcel post. What actually happens is that the addressee interprets the whole message and only rarely the work of interpretation is that to recover the content departing from the form as a spy who tries to decrypt an enemy code message.

So many of the reasons to distinguish between form and content disappear. What usually happens is that a different framework is adopted. Someone produces a message to modify some cognitive attitude of the addressee and once the message has been accepted the only thing that the addresser can do is to hope the interpretation corresponds to what he "wants to say".

2.2. Signs and translation;

2.3. The basis of the concept of translation;

Translation is a special experience. Using the word experience means that translation doesn't concern an object or a relation among objects. This is a crucial point because it has consequences on the theory and practice of translation. A lot of thoughts on translation concentrate themselves on entities as a single concept or words, on their confrontation in different languages, or on the relations of the translated text, for example with the original, with other environments of destinations, with receptors, etc. These entities are like objects that are studied "per se" or in relation with other objects. Totally different is the perspective if we consider translation as activity.

2.4. Similarity

Umberto Eco (2003a) admits that he would like to define translation as: "to say the same thing" but he concludes correctly that this is impossible. At the most, he adds, translation means "To say

almost the same thing”. But also this softened definition doesn't find the agreement of all.

We can help Eco introducing here the concept of similarity. To define similarity we can adopt a semiotic perspective. **It is possible to say that there is similarity between two expressions if there is someone who guarantees and stipulates it.**

2.5. Difference

Similarity is not sufficient; in fact we cannot speak of translation if between two texts there doesn't exist also a difference of some kind. The more obvious example is that the first text is in one language and the second in a different one.

2.6. Mediation

Another characteristic of translation is mediation. When the “source text” cannot circulate in a destination environment, the translated text will take its place. In other words a translation represents the “source text” a little bit as a lawyer represents a client. This means that a translation is an incessant work of mediation. Many authors have stressed this characteristic and have insisted on the “special proxy” received by the translation. Through the “proxy” the translation can act in the name of the “source text”.

2.7. What does the translator produce and re-produce?

The translated text receives a “special proxy” from the “source text” so that it can act in the name of the first. This means that a translation happens between two texts, or better between two sets of definite signs, and that the new text has been reproduced on the basis of the old, in other words that the new text is a rewriting.

2.8. Rewriting and the statute of original;

Translation is a kind of rewriting but it is not only that. In fact if all translations are rewritings, not all rewritings are translations.

For instance, a translated text speaks in the name of the original, while a critical essay about the V Canto of Inferno doesn't speak in the name for Dante.

But there is another idea that circulates on this matter: a translation comes from a text or from a series of well-defined signs. This is a crucial point because it is the basis of the conditions of mediation and rewriting. These two characteristics would not exist if not for a defined text which translation rewrites or which speaks in the name of.

Generally it is quite difficult to find out the precise source of a discourse. For example, during a conversation the sentences are linked together, but what is said has a relation with an heterogeneous

amount of signs and stimulus. This means that it would not be easy to know where our sentences come from.

A translator, on the contrary, could more easily answer this question, because he is almost always able to indicate a passage on the page. But if we would ask him where does an entire translation comes from, the answer would be definitely more complex. Let's think of a publisher who orders the translation of a Russian novel. The new novel, written by the translator, has clearly originated from the Russian one. Anyway, even in this clear example, we do not think neither that the original novel contains all we need for producing the translation, nor that we can carry on translation all exists in the original text.

During rewriting, a translator must of necessity misuse some parts or functions of the Russian text; he has to use his global knowledge, his knowledge of the works of the same author and genre, of Russian literature, of cultural or material objects described in the novel, and so on. A new text will waste some old signs and will add new ones.

There is a second aspect in this topic. Even if literary translation is an important area of translation, it doesn't represent the whole area.

Nowadays, translators work on a wider range of media, material supports and types of texts, and their 'original' has become very complex. Materials that enter in a translation can be just a part of a wider text, the collection of a certain number of different texts or parts of them, etc.

The real case which we can consider very far from the translation of a novel is the electronic word, which has no more the stability of the printed word. Electronic texts can constantly change; they are not the immediate result of the author and can rapidly spread but they can also rapidly disappear, as a fire in a dry wood.

These considerations require the definition of a new concept of text, not as a limited entity closed in objective limits, but as a node of an unlimited space and time net. Should we conclude that the idea that translations come from a defined original text is wrong? **I think the answer is no.** We should simply conclude that to consider the source text as a necessary pre-existent fact is just an illusion. Actually, translation itself defines the cluster of signs that will be its basis: in a certain sense the original text is the product of (its) translation.

2.9. Equivalence;

Often, in Translation Studies, it is mentioned the concept of 'equivalence', maybe the most discussed issue concerning translation. In the Eighties, the concept of equivalence had already been seriously criticised (cfr. Snell-Hornby 1988, Pym 1992). The most significant idea is that equivalence is not only a peculiarity of translated texts, or a fact of translation, but it is its product, and precisely, the result of the interferences translators have during their work.

2.10. Original or copy? A new ethic for translation.

Cervantes said that translating (he referred to what he considered simple languages, as translation from Italian to Spanish) does not require more intelligence or ability than it is necessary to copy from one written sheet to another. This old prejudice is linked to different myths concerning translation. For example the myth of the possibility to produce an equivalent message, or the idea that the translator is invisible, the old myth of the multiplicity of languages as a condemnation of God, and so on.

Nevertheless, everyone who has ever translated, especially without a specific qualification, immediately understands how difficult it is and how sophisticated are the ability and intelligence requested.

So, is translation easy or difficult? We can say that translation has unexpected powers: it turns unaware texts into original ones; recollects confused signs of the source text and organizes them as the basis of translation; establishes equivalence relations. We can say that these conclusions are the basis for a new ethics of translation.

Translator chooses and organizes his own material. He has a more acute sensitivity of the risks and the opportunities of intercultural communication. He is able to prevent problems and solving them, finding new solutions when the already known ones are not sufficient. He has a critical attitude towards norms. In brief, a translator's knowledge and competences are fundamental for a successful communication.

2.11. Again on fidelity and equivalence;

History of translation is thick of recalls for a fidelity to the original text. Nowadays, we know that it is necessary to put the concept of fidelity in an historical context; in fact it is changed during time depending on the cultural context in which it was inscribed. But this perspective has not always been the dominant one. Some time ago it was quite common to find authors who had a univocal definition of translation, which corresponded to the standard of their époque and culture. We are now aware that the concept of fidelity can change and this can originate two reactions of surprise: the first, a little bit ingénue, corresponds to the *stupor* of who did not suspect the existence of different fidelity concepts; the second, the skeptical position, is the view of people who is surprised that the topic of fidelity crosses different ages and different parts of the world. I would say we should adopt a neutral position and consider every point of view.

2.12. The translator and the heterogeneity of languages and cultures.

Which is the textual and cultural material a translator works with? A lot of approaches to translation

adopt ingenuous perspectives concerning concepts like that we have just described. These perspectives presume a linear idea of the products existing before and after a translation. For instance, they presume that before and after translation texts are homogeneous. We have already said that the concept of 'original text' is problematic. Derrida, for example, thinks that a text is the result of different texts, a text comes from a long inter-textual process that builds an object which is for its own nature heterogeneous. In this sense we could add that a text is original in respect to its translation only when speaking in chronological terms. But it is not "original" in the sense of something autonomous, autoproduced. As for the Bible, it does not precede its translations. We are reminded here by Lawrence Venuti (Venuti 1998) that a text doesn't express simply the meaning of the author with a personal style. On the contrary a text moves collective forms in which the author has a psychological involvement but that, due to their nature, are forms that destabilize and depersonalize the meaning. A language in fact is always a multiplicity of past and present forms. This means that a text is a synchronic unit of elements that are structurally contradictory, or heterogeneous.

2.13. Translation changes cultures.

A translated text has its own textual value; this means that a text is not a derivative product but it is something autonomous and original, at least in the culture in which the translation appears. Polysystem Theory worked a lot on this topic, stressing that translations change cultures in which they appear, filling the vacuums of literary polysystem and permitting a culture to restructure itself or even to reconstitute itself with canons that are alien to own tradition.

2.14. Ideology

Is there a relation between translation and Ideology? No if we think that translating means to reproduce the original message in all its functions. Yes if we consider that in many translation projects it is necessary to take decisions and solve complex problems with imagination, experience and cleverness. Ideology is present in every intellectual work, consequently also in translation. The topic of ideology has an important role to play in post-translation studies. In point of fact, however, Susan Bassnett already proposed the theme of ideology, identity and culture as a center of interest for translation in 1991 just at the beginning of the second decade of Translation Studies. The presentation and article were pioneering and showed the changing climate within studies in translation of the Eighties. The new direction replaced traditional categories such as "source text," "target text," and "fidelity" with an expressed interest in the historical, cultural and ideological conditions which determine the translator activity. Similarly and already in the Eighties André Lefevere proposed the topic of ideology as a centre of interest for Translation Studies. The

perspective of Lefevere resembled that of Michel Foucault for whom discourses constitute a complex and unstable system in which they can be an instrument and an effect of power. Lefevere, who wrote many works with Susan Bassnett, has reminded us that every translation is a kind of rewriting and that it is often an ideology that motivates a person to rewrite a text.

Some years later Peter Fawcett, in the article on “Translation and Ideology” published by *Routledge Encyclopedia of TS*, pointed out that institutions and individuals use their beliefs to motivate and affect translation. The author stressed that it is possible to find an ideological approach to translation in many ancient testimonies. In the same direction, Christina Schäffner in 2003 reminded us that translations are inevitably ideological because ideology always lies behind the selection of a source text and the use to which a target text is put. The interests, scopes, and goals of individuals and institutions shape the work and product of translation. Also Christiane Nord in *Translation as A Purposeful Activity* (1997) noted the same thing: decisions about the process of translation are taken, consciously or unconsciously, on the basis of ideological motivations. This means that ideology is determinant in the definition of goals but also in establishing translating strategies and norms.

At the beginning of the nineties an important book by Tejaswini Niranjana (*Siting Translation. History, Post-structuralism and the Colonial Context* [1992]) addressed the relationship between translation ideology and identity. For Niranjana translation is one the most important fields of study for scholars who want to understand how relationships between cultures are established on the basis of a series of asymmetries. Every culture is the bearer of a whole inventory of implicit values that constitute its ideology. These values are present in the process of translation. We find here a form of dissimulation: concepts like fidelity claim to transform a particular perspective into something considered objective. Derrida would speak in this case of a lie. For example translation has developed a decisive role in building a fixed image of Asian, an image that is foundational to the relationship that the western world has established with Asia.

In 2003, Maria Tymoczko researched the position of the translator. Translation for Tymoczko places itself in a special space that is the space where existence is defined as “existence in between” two cultures, two ideologies, two languages, two worldviews, and so forth. In this “in between” space we find a blend of linguistic acts of the source text with the linguistic acts of the target context. Ideology shows itself precisely in the space between these two moments.

We cannot overestimate the importance that the topic of ideology has for the investigation of the relationship between translation and gender. Of lasting significance is the work of Sherry Simon who proposed a sort of alliance between gender studies and translation studies. Actually there are many aspects in common between these two areas. For example they share the mistrust towards traditional hierarchies, they suspect all rules that define fidelity and defend a critical attitude

towards universal canons.

Translation obliges us to reconsider the role of ideology in the building of identities and cultures. In this sense, translation brings into play the relation between language and ideology. It also brings into play as a consequence the idea of language as a constant movement, heterogeneous and polymorphic.

2.15. Bible translations;

3. The tricks of the trade

3.1. The perception of translators in society.

Translation reminds us the fragility of the instruments we use to build our individual and collective identity. We feel Italian or Germans or French because we share inside our group some cultural conventions among which stand out language or languages we learned when we were children. Language constitutes, and at the same time represents, the framework of values which we feel as our home. Language therefore is probably the most powerful identity-forming instrument. It permits us to know who we are marking out a boundary between us and the others who speak, have a behavior and think differently from us.

From this point of view, translators are an exception. Not only do translators speak more than one language but also they spend all their life on a boundary. It is a scandal that sometimes provokes a sort of anxiety in the “social body.” It is comprehensible therefore that different cultures have developed defenses against the scandal of translation. One of these is the simple misrecognition. We are constantly surrounded by translation but we don't pay attention to it also when it is not difficult to notice it. Another defense built by the society against the scandal of translation is the “translator invisibility.” According to this idea the translator is someone who exists between the “original” and the translation but does not appear between the translation and the final reader. It is a case well studied in Translation Studies, especially thanks to the work of Lawrence Venuti (Venuti 1995, 1998). Venuti writes that translated literature has little recognition and it is marginalized. The norms on copyright institutionalize this marginalization and the activity of translators stays in shadow. On an intellectual plane things don't change too much. Translation has been traditionally treated with linguistic tools that often have proposed a mechanical idea of equivalence. In this way the active and creative contribution of the translator as one of the agents who develops and moulds his/her own culture has been ignored (cfr. Also Pym 1999).

3.2. The theoretical and practical training of a translator

Is it useful to speak of theory in translators' training? We think that it can be useful because it

permits to the translators and trainers to think about the ideas that institutions and society have on translation. These ideas are not always evident but they influence translation practices. Theory offers therefore the possibility to wonder about some central questions.

Translation is changing quickly thanks to the huge quantity of information that we all have at disposal, but also thanks to the grown of the intercultural contacts and the use of Internet. The need of translation is growing constantly. A translator today cannot work well without wide knowledge, and above all of new technologies. But technical training is not enough. New technologies have pushed a big change that needs also a solid theoretical basis to face the continuous changes in an intelligent and productive way. The world needs translators who not only are able to use technology but also are able **to interpret correctly the function of technologies**. This discourse is valid for every kind of translation. For example an editorial translator needs to know how the book market works and also what are the ideological conditions in which he /her translates. This is a part of his/her knowledge, of his/her intellectual role. And only in this framework he/her will not be anymore invisible. The translator is invisible when he/her is not aware of his/her social role. This probably has been the big problem of translators in the past.

The training of translators has to put together **the craft of the translator with the awareness of the craft**. But a translator can acquire the awareness of what he/she is if he/she understands his/her social and cultural role: the relation with institutions and industry, the reasons of the prestige or of the absence of prestige of a translator in society. And also his/her role to determine the canon in a culture and language. Paraphrasing Hegel we can say that theory without practice is dumb, the practice without theory is deaf.

We think that the real tricks **of the trade** are those that help to put into practice strategies like those just presented.

3.3. Not only words;

After what it has been said, it is not necessary to insist on the fact that translating means much more than replace the words of the “original” language with those of the target language.

3.4 Hermeneutical and cognitive attitude

Intelligent study and conscious practice of translation develop unique mental habits.

The first of these habits is a very peculiar kind of interpretation. For example, many persons have had the experience of reading a text just for pleasure or interest, and after some time, to translate it. Whoever has lived this experience, should remember that during the translation he/she found much more than in his/her first reading. This is because when we read a text with the purpose to translate it, we read it with an attitude that is more suspicious, careful and complete. In brief, during the

translation we try to extract all that could be helpful to produce the new text. (It is important to stress that using the word 'text' we do not only refer to a written page.) Nowadays translators work even more on syncretic texts, as pc programs and web pages, and they have more and more translation requests also for old media - such as television and cinema- too. With the passing of time, this **interpretative intensity** becomes a mental habit that can be deliberately activated. Translation has a second effect, seemingly in opposition to the first one: we can call it **immediate absorption**.

Especially at the beginning of his career, a translator usually works on many topics. Translating, he/she cannot leave any dark side of the original text; but what happens if the text is about a totally unknown topic? Many authors have commented upon the fact that, with the passing of time, translators become eclectic: they are specialized on a particular field but they know something of all matters.

The immediate absorption, very common among translators, permits the development of a precious mental habit. Translators believe that is possible knowing everything - even we don't know if they are more brave or unconscious affirming that.

Now, let's go through the second -apparently contradictory- couple of cognitive attitudes inspired by translation. The first derives from the fact that translating is an experience and knowledge (or better is a knowledge because it is an experience).

With a new project of translation begins a new phase of study and thinking: it is necessary to have a good knowledge of the matter of translation and study carefully the source text, then the translator has to understand the target context and should define the function of the message he's elaborating. At the end of this phase, all piled up knowledge has to become the new text.

That moment is the moment of the white page. He leaves the world of knowledge to enter the world of practical doing.

If before the mind needed to be open and consider all possibilities allowed by the original text, now the mind has to close and to choose among the alternatives to build up the new text.

The mental habit induced by this exercise is simply **pragmatism**, that is the ability to evaluate ideas and their predictable practical consequences.

The second element of this couple is a common characteristic of translation: the provisional nature of translation, which derives from at least three factors.

First of all, there is revision practice: translators know that everything they write can be rewritten by themselves or by other people.

Second, if ten translators translate the same original text, it does not matter how fixed is it, they will produce ten different translations.

Ultimately, it is not unusual that some fundamental texts will be translated again (the Bible for

example).

For these and other reasons, translators have been always aware of a fact that scientists discovered just few years ago: a text is not a fixed and invariable entity, but it is an “apparatus that generates interpretations”, just to quote Umberto Eco (Eco 1983).

The fusion of pragmatism and awareness of translation’s provisional nature is a good blend.

3.5. Sensitivity;

We have proposed three characteristics that are fundamental to understand translation: similarity, difference and mediation. What does it mean to work with similarity, difference and mediation? A qualified translator is used to finding out analogies between different entities; he does not fear differences and finds compromises or unknown solutions, even where it seems there are only contradictions.

The novelty is that these characteristics lie deeply in the beliefs, wishes, mental states which motivate the actions of linguistic and cultural mediators. It is a kind of sensitivity - or, to be more precise- of a general attitude a translator shows in different ways towards every kind of text.

3.6. The Bible translator.

4. Tools

4.1. Technology and Translation;

New technologies in translation have different influences. First of all, on communication. Secondly, modern electronic tools widen the amount of data a single person can access (how many information we can access and how fast).

4.2. Communication;

4.3. Automatic Translation;

4.4 .Translation Memories;

4.5. Localization Tools;

4.6. Advantages and disadvantages of the tools.