ISSUES IN TRANSLATION THEN AND NOW
Renaissance Theories and Translation Studies Today

Abstracts:

Guyda Armstrong (University of Manchester), Reconsidering Renaissance metaphors of translation: dress, hexis, and materiality

The paratexts of Renaissance translated book-objects are replete with metaphors of dress and the dynamics of interpersonal exchange, where the intercultural and interlinguistic transfer, and the text itself, are embodied and materialized in various forms. From Boccaccio’s Plesaunt Disport of divers Noble Personages (1567), ‘tourned out of his native attyre into this our English habite’, through John Florio’s embodiment of his 1603 Montaigne as a defective female fosterling, brought across the Channel and ‘put […] into English clothes’, to the 1620 English Decameron’s translator (perhaps also John Florio), whose text ‘cometh […] to kisse your Noble hand, and to shelter it selfe under your Gracious protection’, metaphors such as these of dress, identity, and bearing, personify the target text and/or its translator within the social worlds in which it is produced and circulates. Renaissance metaphors of translation thus express fundamental social relations which are enacted within the codified material object of the book. Using a selection of Renaissance translatorial paratexts, this paper will revisit these conventional and familiar metaphors of translation via sociological terms which are increasingly used in contemporary translation studies, such as Bourdieu’s habitus and hexis. The notion of bodily hexis, in particular, will be considered in terms of the Renaissance translator’s self-presentation and their representation of his or her text; the paper will reflect also on the book itself as a material embodiment of shared social values and intentions.

Stefano U. Baldassarri (ISI Florence), Girolamo Catena’s “Discorso sopra la traduttione delle scienze e d’altri facoltà”

In his “De interpretazione libri duo” (first published in 1661 and then again, in extended format, in 1683), Pierre Daniel Huet mentions a treatise on translation theory by the sixteenth-century Italian humanist Girolamo Catena. Although little known to modern scholars, Catena enjoyed a successful career at the court of Pius V (who sat on the papal chair from 1556 to 1572) and served as secretary to a number of high prelates. A veritable product of Italian Counter-Reformation culture, Catena pursued a wide range of scholarly interests. Among them was translation theory, as can be evinced from the text mentioned by Huet, whose full title reads “Discorso sopra la traduttione delle scienze e d’altri facoltà.” Originally delivered as a speech to the Accademia degli Affidati (of which Catena was a member), it eventually grew into a book of no fewer than 95 pages in its first (and only) edition, which appeared in Venice in 1581. Despite its having been neglected by most experts in this field of studies, Catena’s treatise is deserving of attention for several reasons. First, its criticism of stylistically elegant though far from faithful translations foreshadows the polemic on the so-called “belles infidèles” to which — among many others — Huet himself will contribute in the seventeenth century. This can also be usefully compared with such notions as domestication and foreignization in translation theory from German romanticism to authors like Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti. Second, because of its comparison between classical and recent translations, Catena can be included in the vast “Querelle of Ancients and Moderns” from this particular perspective. Finally, owing to his Catholic orthodoxy and long-time service at the papal curia, Catena’s text provides precious information on translation theory and practice in Counter-Reformation Italy.”
Annet den Haan (Aarhus University), The Letter and the Spirit: (un)translatability in Bible translation

In After Babel, George Steiner wrote that “[over] some two thousand years of argument and precept, the beliefs and disagreements voiced about the nature of translation have been almost the same. Identical theses, familiar moves and refutations in debate recur, nearly without exception, from Cicero and Quintilian to the present day.” (Steiner 1975, 239) This paper intends to qualify Steiner’s statement by following one issue of translation through the ages: the point of (un)translatability in Bible translation. Bible translation theory typically problematizes the understanding of the true ‘sense’ of Scripture, which can be accessed through the exegetical tradition, through linguistic skills, or through revelation by the Holy Spirit.

This paper gives an overview of discussions on this topic, focusing on the Renaissance and on Latin translation in particular. It compares Renaissance ideas on Bible translation, which are rooted in a tradition going back to Antiquity, with modern translation theory. In the Renaissance, approaches to Bible translation range from 15th-century Italian attempts at domestication in the works of Lorenzo Valla and Aurelio Lippi Brandolini, to 16th-century notions of the sacred nature of the original languages in e.g. Erasmus and Ximenes. Renaissance arguments of (un)translatability are in their turn contrasted with modern Bible translation theory, particularly Eugene Nida’s notion of dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964) and the skopos-theory.

This comparison shows that 1) the history of Bible translation theory is by no means static, and 2) there is a fundamental difference between ideas on Bible translating in the classical tradition and in modern theory: whereas the Renaissance authors debate the degree of stylistic freedom in the translated text, modern theorists have shifted their focus to the effect on the reader.

Reka Forrai (University of Southern Denmark), Rewriting: a modern theory for a pre-modern practice

In my presentation I would like to focus on a notion from the theorists of cultural translation (or cultural turn in translation) which, I will argue, is also a key concept for medieval and renaissance translators: rewriting.

I will build on the work of André Lefevere, a theorist who discusses translation both within the frame of systems and of culture. According to him, people and/or institutions in power positions, that is to say, professionals and their patrons 'rewrite' texts in various ways to serve various ends, and translation is just one such rewriting technique, along with historiography, commentaries, editing, etc.

Indeed in medieval and humanist literary traditions rewriting was seen as a compositional method both in inter- and intralingual situations. Working with this concept clarifies a lot of medieval and humanist cases where otherwise debates about fidelity/infidelity, authorship/translatorship, originality/plagiarism, and paraphrase/translation would endlessly go on. I am thinking of Bruni’s ‘plagiarism’ of Procopius for example, or the countless instances in medieval hagiography, where scholars in vain try to demarcate an ‘original’ text from its different variant retellings. This framework would also account for the close relationship there is between texts and their commentaries in case of translations of philosophical texts.

I am therefore going to examine various medieval and renaissance translation practices where it seems that this theoretical frame is at work. I will, when possible, look at both the application and the conceptualization of rewriting. I will look at the technique of rewriting as a basic rhetorical and hermeneutical device and trace its various techniques depending on the literary genre concerned,
whether hagiography, philosophy or historiography. I will also study translators’ prefaces with the aim of identifying their reasons for rewriting and comparing this to the modern politics of rewriting as sketched by Lefevere. Additionally I will try to trace medieval and renaissance theories of rewriting back to their probable sources of inspiration, that is to say models of compositions in ancient rhetoric.

Theo Hermans (University College London), *Untranslatability and Entanglement*

Untranslatability is normally understood as the impossibility of translation. In recent years the concept has been highlighted in discussions about world literature and in the large *Dictionary of Untranslatables* edited by the French philosopher Barbara Cassin (first French edition 2004; English version 2014). It has come to signify not so much what prevents translation as what impedes it. The vocabulary however is that of mistranslation, distortion, loss and repeated retranslation. Cassin describes the untranslatable as “what one keeps on (not) translating.”

While these approaches usefully foreground linguistic and cultural difference, they also perpetuate the chimera of perfect translation and posit a fullness of meaning in the original which individual translations always fail to grasp. In this sense it seems to me they overlook the historical role of translation as the construction of meaning in particular situations.

When conditions demand it, translation will take place and serve a local, immediate purpose. I will argue that we can learn more about translation from its concrete entanglements than from its alleged inadequacies. I will illustrate my case with reference to three sixteenth-century translators – Juan de Betanzos in Peru, Thomas Harriot in London and Virginia, and Michele Ruggieri in China – who confronted languages and cultures utterly different from their own and yet forged translations that met the urgency of the situation there and then.

Brenda M. Hosington (University of Montreal/ University of Warwick), *Materiality and Media Technology: Modern Translation Theory and English Renaissance Paratextual Discourse*

Writing within the context of textual, material and media studies (Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, D. F. McKenzie, Jerome McGann, Randall McLeod, Ludwig Pfeiffer, Hans Ulrich Gombrich) Karen Littau has called for a material history of translation that would demonstrate how media technologies over the centuries have exerted the same influence on translating practices as on writing and reading habits. If, she asks, materiality underlies all cultural transfer, including translation, and is marked by continuous change (such as the advent of print), would materiality and media studies throw new light on translating strategies? More recently, she has called for an integrated approach that would engage translation, material, and media studies, since media technologies constitute enabling and transforming processes that make translation possible and underpin, through material forms, the production, distribution, and reception of the translated text. Other theorists (Michael Cronin, M. Olohan, Christine Mitchell) have also urged us to think about translation as a ‘material practice’ and to consider the role of ‘material agency’ and material ‘things’ in producing translated texts. A few (Guyda Armstrong, Anne Coldiron, Joshua Reid) have applied such theory to English Renaissance translation, underlining the importance of materiality in understanding early modern translating practices and discussing translations as material objects or book-objects, themselves subject to trans-mediation. Others have rightly noted the concurrence of an enormous increase in translation output and the rapid development of the material means and inter-medial techniques that facilitated it.

English Renaissance translators, on the contrary, offer no sustained theoretical discussion on the subject (or indeed on any other, with the exception of Lawrence Humphrey). However,
comments gleaned from their paratexts on various aspects of what we call materiality enable us to respond to some of Littau’s questions and to address some of the issues she – and others – have raised. Translating strategies, like the material features of the translation, are chosen with regard to audience appropriateness and the oft expressed need ‘to make common’ a variety of works. Pedagogical translation, too, is closely related to material concerns, as many schoolmen-translators state. Inter-medial translation raises questions of how to convert the diversity of speech into the uniformity demanded by print and how to convert unstable script into the supposedly more stable printed text. Thus Renaissance translators’ paratexts function, not only as a ‘threshold into the work’, to use Genette’s expression, but also as a space in which to articulate views on the rapport between the material and medial aspects of a translation and on the strategies employed in producing it.

Massimiliano Morini (University of Udine), Intertextuality and early modern translation theory

Before the late seventeenth century, no one produced a full-blown, coherent theory of translation in English – the Earl of Roscommon and John Dryden being commonly assumed to be the first true explorers in this uncharted territory. Before that time, and particularly in the Tudor era, English versions of foreign or classical texts seem to appear without any reference to any universally accepted notion of translation – the wide difference between any two of them often reinforcing this impression.

While recently there has been some recognition that an absence of explicit theoretical pronouncements does not entail lack of theory (Morini 2006), one of the reasons why modern commentators do not understand or “catch” early English translation theory may be that much of it is intertextual (though not necessarily in the post-structuralistic sense expounded in Haberer 2007). In their paratextual apparati (and occasionally, by means of their very target texts, or the material aspect of their books), translators align their sources and practices to other texts and discourses, and in particular to classical and biblical texts and to contemporary translations of the same.

With examples ranging from Virgil’s translators to Thomas Hoby and John Harington, I intend to show how these references, whether positive or negative (i.e., negating the similarity between the work in hand and the one alluded to by the translator), may be seen to link these seemingly a-theoretical translations with a web of theory that unites early modern England with the rest of Europe, and calls into question the opinions of many modern translation theorists, namely that the Renaissance, at least in England, had no theory of “literary translation”.

References

Siri Nergaard (University of Bologna and University of Florence), Untranslatability. The new importance given to the concept, and its historical foundations

Untranslatability is in current translation studies considered with more interest than ever. It started with Barbara Cassin’s Vocabulaire européen des philosophies (2004) that was translated, and expanded into The Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon under the direction of Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood in 2014. It was the English edition, with a new title emphasizing the translation issue, which put untranslatability anew on the agenda of translation studies, from where it for many years had been absent. Both the new introduction by the English language editors, and the additional untranslatable words contributed in this direction. The book received much attention among the translation scholars, and the reaction was almost as if we had to
In this paper I will discuss the new attention given to the concept of untranslatability through the named book, and expand it in relation to cultural translation. I will look at the concept’s foundations in older translation theories, and contextualizing the book, and relating its content to older thinking on translation, I will look at how untranslatability in some way always complement translation, and inevitably has to be part of any thinking on translation.

Marianne Pade (Danish Academy at Rome), “Conquering Greece”

Fifteenth-century Italy witnessed an explosion both in the production of Latin translations from the Greek and in theoretical writings on translations. Humanist translators repeatedly refer to the loci classici of ancient translation: (Ps.) Cicero’s On the Best Kind of Orator (14), Horace’s Art of Poetry (133-34), and Jerome’s letter to Pammachius. This could be the reason why humanist translation theory is more or less ignored by parts of modern translation studies. For instance in After Babel (1975), George Steiner divided the literature on the theory, practice and history of translation into four periods. The first lasted for more than 1800 years, extending from Cicero and Horace up to the publication of Alexander Fraser Tytler’s Essay on the Principles of Translation in 1791! But actually a lot more was at stake in humanist translation theory than the issues brought up by Cicero, Horace, and Jerome. In my paper I shall argue that from the beginning of the fifteenth century there was among Italian humanists a discussion of what we today would call domestication vs. foreignizing translation (Venuti 1995, 2008). The father of humanist translation theory, the Byzantine Manuel Chrysoloras, advocated some kind of foreignizing translation in which the foreignness of the source language would remain visible and the reader made to move towards the author (Schleiermacher, Lefevere 1977). However humanist theoreticians increasingly began to favour domesticating translation, even developing a new vocabulary to describe their aims and methods. They were so successful that representatives of the source culture protested against the ‘ethnocentric violence’ their authors were subjected to (Venuti). Though most translators aimed at fluency, they were aware that transparency was an illusion and addressed the question of how to achieve it. Some of the strategies explored – imitation, intertextuality, aemulatio – involved a notable degree of independence vis-à-vis the original, privileging the role of the translator over the author.

Andrea Rizzi (University of Melbourne), Visible translators: self-portraits, self-descriptions, and a zoomorphic simile

Early modern translators were often visible and vocal about their identity and intellectual ambitions. This paper responds to a recent invitation to re-historicise the modern and contemporary invisibility of translators (Coldiron). It also connects with current scholarship on the invisibility or dislocation of the translators’ voices in twenty first-century literature (Adamo, McLaughlin, Venuti). Exploring the visibility of early modern translators allows us to better understand the present ‘silence’ of translators’ voices in the name of linguistic fluency and cultural uniformity. This paper focuses on strategies of visibility employed by translators in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe; specifically, on their recourse to self-portraits, self-descriptions, and zoomorphic self-representations to accompany their manuscript and printed translations. Through these images and descriptions, translators asserted their authority as reliable cultural agents, while also exposing the
perils of *imitatio* and subservience to patrons, publishers, or readers. These images destabilise key aesthetic values underscoring modern and contemporary translation (fidelity, accessibility, fluency).

Harm-Jan van Dam (Vrije Universiteit), *Humanist translation in the Netherlands: Hugo Grotius*

Among translators in the (Northern) Netherlands the learned humanists of Leiden University take up a distinct position: they translated from Greek or Latin into Dutch, but also from Greek into Latin, from Dutch into Latin or from Latin into Greek, as citizens both of the international republic of letters and of the emerging Dutch national community. Recent research, notably by Theo Hermans, has brought to light much about (reflection on) Dutch translation in the sixteenth and seventeenth century; in my paper I will focus on Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and his circle(s). As a translator he covered several genres, such as poetry, scientific and political prose, and drama; in several phases of his life and in different surroundings: as a scholar and leading politician in Holland, an exile and an ambassador in Paris; he translated into Dutch, Latin and Greek; and he speaks about his work in prefaces and in many letters of his Correspondence. I will try to situate Grotius and the way in which he positions himself as a translator in the contexts of learned humanism, of Dutch patriotism and the academic pursuit of a new Dutch poetic language in Leiden, and also of non-academic Dutch translators and poets. In studying Grotius’ choices on a larger and smaller scale, his awareness and use of the expectations and norms of his various publics, and of his own position, I will make use of concepts from descriptive translation studies as introduced since the 1960’s, in particular polysystem theory and also elements from skopos theory. In focussing on the non-hierarchical coexistence of interacting systems, the dynamics of Greek (neo)latin and vernacular, we will obtain a better appreciation of the variation in Grotius’ practice and theory of translation, and we may see that he was aware of theoretical questions.

Anna Wegener (Danish Academy at Rome), *On intertextuality in translation*

In *De interpretatione recta* (On the Correct Way to Translate), Leonardo Bruni proposed that the translator be both an excellent reader and rewriter of literary texts. Through extensive reading in the source language, the translator should acquire the necessary literary and cultural knowledge to recognize quotations from or allusions to the works of philosophers, orators, poets and other writers in the source text. And when rewriting the source text, the translator should be able to imitate the expressions of the best writers of the target language, a feat he could only accomplish if he was eminently well-read in this language as well. Stated in present-day terminology, through his emphasis on the importance of the double literary culture of the translator Leonardo Bruni insisted that the translator be able to perceive the intertextual relations established by the foreign literary text and somehow recreate them in translation. This paper sets out to present an overview of some of the main current theories of intertextuality in translation (Gérard Genette, Lawrence Venuti and others) and juxtapose them with Bruni’s requirements for a competent translator.