

Translation and Civilization:
The Third Realm

Peter Newmark

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People talk about translation as though it were a single subject, but literary and non-literary translation are as different as chalk from cheese, even if, like chalk and cheese, they look the same.

Many countries in fact have two translator associations: literary, and general or technical. This broadly recognises the fact that translation, and in fact all writing, is concerned either with fiction or with fact, with imagination or with reality, even with people or with objects. I am now suggesting that increasingly, translation is going to be concerned with an intermediate area, what the great British literary critic F.R. Leavis (1895-1978) called "the third realm": that is the realistic, basically factual description of humans relations, centred on words of quality (silly, sensible) and value (right, wrong, good, bad) stemming in the first place from the mind, not the eye, from judgement, not observation. This is what the public services of welfare and education are about, and the field stretches from counselling to public notices, from immigration to cultural communication, from human rights to their denial, from the urgently topical issues, in this age of migrations and minorities, of the flights of refugees, often under the compulsion of tyrannies and violent prejudices to the voluntary movements of travellers, gypsies or romanes.

However, before I discuss this "third realm", I have to point out that all the old tags about translation, from 'Translators are traitors', to 'Beautiful translators are as faithless as beautiful women', to any of Thomas Savory's dozen contradictory propositions: from 'A translation must give the words of the original' to 'A translation must give the ideas of the original'; from 'A translation must reflect the style of the original' to 'A translation should possess the style of the translation' (Savory was obscure here)... all these translation tags are really an overspill of the days when Translation was only thought of or considered as literary translation. Non-literary translation, if clearly written, has few deceptions of this nature, and in this area, linguistically divergent versions –and they always will diverge– are not important. Let me come to an example, say an article about Sir Leon Brittan in the current British Midland air magazine *Voyager*: "If a week is a long time in politics, then the best part of a decade must seem like an eternity".

This sentence is translated into German as: *Wenn eine Woche in der Politik eine lange Zeit bedeutet, dann muss ein gutes Jahrzehnt wie eine Ewigkeit sein*, meaning: "If a week in politics is (literally: signifies) a long time, then anything more than a decade must appear an eternity", and into French as: *Si une semaine est une duree considerable en politique, alors une decennie peut sembler une eter-nite*.

It will be seen that both the German and the French diverge slightly from the English (note particularly the muted emphasis on "politics" in the German) but these differences are quite trivial. In fact I would say that the only "problems"... quite enough, you may say... in non-literary translation are cultural items, idioms, which are standardized metaphors, cognates across languages, neologisms, insti-

tutional terms and the metaphors that "strictly" belong to literary texts (since after all, metaphors are all literally fiction), and are however a constituent part of non-literary writing as they are of all speech, but the prime difficulty is usually the bad writing. (Here I exclude legal texts, philosophy, linguistics, and any text that is so well written and concise that each word appears to be essential and therefore authoritative.)

In other non-literary texts, the most important thing is to get the facts right, that is the objects and the action; the descriptive element will only be approximate, and allows more tolerances. The facts in these texts are always more important than the language, the precise words. In the article from *Voyager* and its translations: rushed out, *s'empresèrent*, *waren schnell dabei*; tour, *faire la tournée de*; *wandern durch*; secure, *confortable*, *sicher*; enthusiasm, *enthousiasme*, *Enthusiasmus* (sic). For words of quality, it is only the grecolatinisms, the cognates, replicated in each translation, and so disapproved of by old-fashioned translation teachers and translators, that ensure that the translations are accurate.

Now contrast this with an example of literary translation:

Say this city has ten million souls.

Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:

Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had country and we thought it fair,

Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:

We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

(From "Say this City", by W.H. Auden)

Denk dir, diese Stadt hat zehn Millionen Seelen,

Manche leben in Villen, manche leben in Hohlen:

Doch für uns is kein Platz, mein Lieb, doch für uns ist kein Platz.

Wir hatten einst eine Heimat und hielten sie für schön

Schau in den Atlas, dort wirst du sie liegen sehen:

Wir können nicht mehr hin, mein Lieb, wir können nicht mehr hin

(Herbert Schonheer).

At first sight, this German appears to be magnificently literal, but in fact many lexical items are slightly different. Nevertheless, the metre, the syntax and the rhymes remain, and I think it a superb translation, as powerful as the original, with an equivalent sound effect, and the yearning *hin*.

Disons que cette ville a dix millions d'âmes

Dans ses riches hôtels, ou ses tristes tanières:

Mais il n'y a pas de place pour nous, chérie,

Mais il n'y a pas de place pour nous.

Nous avions un pays, et nous le croyions beau,

Regarde dans l'atlas, et tu l'y trouveras:

Nous n'y pouvons aller maintenant, chérie
Nous n'y pouvons plus aller maintenant.
(Jacques E. David)

From: Ohne Hass und Fahne: Kriegsgedichte des 20 Jahrhunderts. 1959.
Rowohlt Taschenbuch. Hamburg)

The French translation is inferior. The rhymes, the rhythms, the stresses, the structures, many of the meanings are all reduced. Is this because French has such a small vocabulary? Could the great Pierre Leyris have done better?

In short, literary translation has twice as many factors to account for as non-literary translation, which does not necessarily make it more difficult; but it is likely to be less accurate than non-literary translation, since it has to pay attention, from its beginning to its end, to sound, which comprises the following factors: alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, rhyme, metre, polisemy; further, the role of metaphor, pun and metalingualism becomes especially important.

However, my main concern here is to distinguish first, "technical" translation, which is basically about objects or facts, and secondly, literary translation, which is about imaginary people, or in its supreme form, imaginary people used as types and symbols representing living people, from what I designate as "social translation". Social translation is concerned with the accurate translation of texts about living people, and in particular their human qualities, the most important instances being texts relating to human rights and their violations.

Here I have to point out that there are two special factors that affect the significant components of these texts: that is, words of human qualities (nice, nasty) and values (right, wrong); firstly, though they may originate from a common medieval Latin, and designate universals, they are affected in the course of time by cultural factors, and change substantially in meaning: virtue originally meant physical courage, candour innocence (as in *Candide*), sincerity truth, the Latin *scurra* of buffoon turned to oddness in German and scurrilousness in English; niceness came from delicacy and originally ignorance. English is notorious for its synonyms, but of seven classical Latin words for grief, all carefully distinguished with appropriate adjectives by Cicero, not more than three remain in English or French, which suggests a focus or preoccupation with this emotion which has since declined.

Secondly, words of human quality tend to have positive, neutral and negative connotations, and the translator has to sense the appropriate one: take economical (thrifty) and mean or stingy; courageous and foolhardy; generous and extravagant; compassion and sentimentality, as Nietzsche noted.

I use the term "social" to indicate that these texts are concerned primarily with persons as individuals or groups of any size, understood from a point of view that is consonant with the principles of the *U.N. Declaration of Universal Human Rights*, which is neither subjective nor objective. A social sense is implicit in them.

These texts have particular linguistic characteristics, of which the more striking are lexical units denoting moral qualities ("free and equal in dignity and rights") and illocutionary or conative sentences disguised as existential statements ("Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.")

If we now take some representative words of moral quality, say "virtuous", "vicious", "economical", "sober", "licentious", we recognize they are universals and therefore apparently easy to translate. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth, as Tytler noted in his pioneering book on translation in 1790. (*Essay on the Principles of Translation*.) Words of moral quality slide easily from positive to negative (virtuous, prudish; economical, stingy; brave, foolhardy), modify their meaning more quickly in one language than in another ("generous" as well-born and lavish; virtuous from physically brave) and are therefore the most ample source of false cognates or false friends in translation. Furthermore, many of these words (fine, fair, not bad, amazing, etc.) are the ones most subject to irony, which may be rather more obscure or opaque in the translator's language and the readership's perception, and would normally be made explicit: two negatives, as an expression of understatement, converted to a positive, is quite a common translation procedure, even where pride rather than irony is intended: "she is no mean cook"; "es una cocinera excelente".

Looking at the epoch-making *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, fifty years after its publication, one notes at once that French and Italian still stick to the historical *Rights of Man*, which Canadian French has changed to *Rights of the Person*. The English version has the three classical untranslatable keywords "privacy", "home" and "fair", as well as the particular "outrage" as a verb, the verbal nouns "disregard" and "contempt", "standard of achievement", "strive to", "trust", "genuinely", the neologism "of full age", and several standard terms such as "freedom of movement and residence", "freedom of thought".

I propose now to review the official translation of these words; beginning with the key words which have roots in the language often independent of context.

President Reagan once sneered that Russian has no word for privacy, unaware that it is missing in nearly all other languages: here we have *vie privee*, *vida privada* (Sp.), *vita privata*, *Privatleben*, *soukromi* (Cz), *lichni i semeini zizn* (R). No language here has the affective meaning of "privacy" except Czech, whilst Russian replaces it with "personal and family life".

For "home", there is *domicile*, *casa*, *domicilio* (Sp.), *Heim*, *shilishcha*, *dom*, where German preserves the full denotative and the affective meanings, and the others alternate between general and legal terms.

"Fair", associated with cricket and fair-play, is a classical cultural term often appropriated by German; in the texts we have *equitable*, (Sp.) *equo*, *con justicia*, *der Billigkeit entsprechend*, *spravedlivi* (just), and *osno polnovi ravenstvo*. Again, the other languages shift to a formal register, but the educated *Billigkeit* comes closest to the English.

"Outrage" is a sonorous word, its Latinity (rabies) disguised, whose physicality is lost in *revolter* in the French and *offendere* in the Italian, but not in *ultrarjar* (Sp.) but certainly again in the feeble *verletzen*, *urazit*, and *vozmushchat*, the three last words clearly too weak.

In "standard of achievement", "standard" (but not level) again appears unique to English. The French only has idéal à atteindre (ideal to be attained), the Italian ideale da raggiungersi (ditto), the Spanish ideal por el que todos deben esforzarse, German das zu erreichende Ideal, Czech cíl (target!), Russian zadacha (task). Standard, ideal, task and target are too divergent in my judgement.

"Of full age" appears to be a formal neologism to translate marriageable or the age of puberty; French has l'âge nubile, Italian in età adatta, a suitable age, Spanish a partir de la edad nubil, German neiratsranig, Czech of full age, Russian age of majority. The terms are hardly equivalent, since in some countries, the law is only concerned with the age of consent "for marriage", Czech plnoletost, Russian sovershennoletija (both of full age). "Strive to" has a personal intense flavour associated with literary language. The "equivalents", s'efforcer de, sforzarsi, esforzarse, sich bemühen (take care to, which is weaker), are more frequent words that would not be associated with literature.

"Genuinely", otherwise German echt, here has components of real and sincere, the latter of which is missing in réellement, realmente, realmente (omitted in the German, Czech skutečné, Russian в действительности (in fact). Note that the brilliant distinction between "historic", famous in history, and "historical", of history, in the Introduction here, does not exist in the other languages.

Lastly I take the standard institutional terms, "freedom of movement and residence" and "freedom of thought". In French, these become: le droit de circuler librement et de choisir sa résidence; liberté de pensée; in Italian la libertà di movimento e di residenza; la libertà di pensiero; in Spanish, derecho a circular libremente y a elegir su residencia; la libertad de pensamiento; in German das Recht auf Freizügigkeit und freie Wahl seines Wohnsitzes; die Gedankenfreiheit (made famous by Schiller in his tragedy, Don Carlos, which when performed in the Nazi period created an outburst from the audience, and was not performed again); Czech právo volně se pohybovat a svobodně si voliti bydliště; svoboda myšlení; and in Russian právo svobodno peredvigatsya i bibrat sebe mestoshitelstvo; svoboda misli (the right to circulate freely and to choose one's place of residence; freedom of thought). (Note again the fearsome long Russian words, a difficulty in translating any sound effect.) Here it is clear that the collocations in "freedom of thought" are fixed, but the first two phrases are still flexible.

Theodore Zeldin in his important article, "Translation and Civilization" (see *Translation Here and There Now and Then*. Edited by Jane Taylor, Edith Mc Morran and Guy Leclercq Elm Bank Exeter 1996) has pointed out that "the aim now is increasingly going to be the exchange of respect between individuals, rather than the domination of one person or group by another. Translators are, par excellence, intermediaries in the spread of mutual respect".

With the fall of the ideologies ("no longer is it necessary for unity in attitudes and beliefs to be a mark of civilisation" united we stand, divided we fall... and such nonsense... no longer is it necessary for civilisation to be linked with power.")

Humane translation cannot be practiced in terms of social constriction. It is a

truth seeking activity, pursuing the factual moral aesthetic and logical truth in the texts it works on, incorporating the idioms of another language through literal translation where it lacks them in its own ("I wish you a lucky hand"), and, in the case of some texts, showing up the scandals feebly disguised as cultural traditions: not long ago President Kenyatta complained that the female circumcision practiced in his country was a part of the national culture, and that any exposure through the translation of the relevant reports was an unwarranted interference.

The language of the third realm of social translation, which is neither subjective nor objective is governed by the now rapidly expanding scope of human rights. Already in this decade, the Council of Europe and the World Health Organization have issued guidelines which offer moderate and sensible alternatives (diabetic patients) to the radical and rebarbative terms issued by the Political Correctness associations (diabetically challenged) for the present current dehumanising prejudices (diabetic cases). Whilst human beings are central to this area, its most telling language is that of reporting rather than that of literature in any romantic or novelistic sense: "transitory" for "fleeting" or "ephemeral"; "reluctant" for "loath to"; "devoted to" for "fond of"; "wobbly" for "wonky". These distinctions are tentative and my own, and in the case of some words are subject to fashion. In other cases, the literary word may be more precise and colloquial than the factual, but it is important that this language should not be sensational or sentimental, since it is often concerned with vulnerability and infringement of human rights.