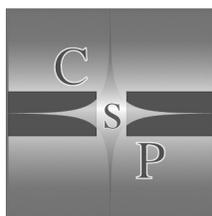


Culture-Bound Translation and Language in the Global Era

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Edited by

Aleksandra Nikčević-Batrićević
and Marija Knežević



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The collection of papers in front of you is a selection of proceedings from the Second international conference on English language and literary studies, *Language and Culture*, which took place in September 2006, at the Faculty of Philosophy, Nikšić, University of Montenegro. Many people have helped to make this book possible, confirming one more time the famous lines by John Donne that “no man is an island entire of himself”. Therefore, we are grateful to all the people who influenced its preparation and supported the organization of the conference, among them especially to Professor Bojka Đukanović, dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, for her intellectual and emotional support throughout the project and to Professor Nick Ceramella, University La Sapienza Rome, who, led by high professional criteria, spent many hours discussing the collection with us. Special thanks go to Slavica Rosić, from the American Embassy in Podgorica, Montenegro, for her enthusiastic support of the whole project: if it weren’t for the financial support of the American Embassy, the conference would probably never take place. Thanks, also, to our dedicated students, for their curiosity, wit and enthusiasm—it is among them that we feel the greatest inspiration and pleasure.

Our largest debt goes to our families for their support and encouragement. The volume in front of you is therefore dedicated to our children, Tanja, Dimitrije, Ana, and Vuk. To quote from the famous poem by Emily Dickinson, “this is our letter to the world”; we weaved it with great love and, hopefully, to your enjoyment.

Aleksandra and Marija
Podgorica, November 2007.

INTRODUCTION

This book comprises a selection of papers delivered at the 2006 Language and Culture Conference, which took place at the University of Montenegro, Faculty of Philosophy, Nikšić, Department of English Language and Literature, where 70 participants presented their works. The authors of these papers are research scholars and academic teachers who were brought together by their interest in translation and language studies.

This collection attempts to contribute a further element of rigour into the discussion of cultural and linguistic studies as well as to provide a model for teaching translation and language through culture to would-be translators, teachers of English and linguists alike. Within this context, it can be considered as an introduction, as it were, to current understanding of culture aimed at raising our awareness of its role in constructing and perceiving reality through translation and linguistic communication.

The title of this collection, *Culture-bound Translation and Language in the Global Era*, suggests the wide scope and spirit of our culture and times. The essays gathered here are divided under two headings: Translation and Language, five on each area, making up Part One and Part Two of this book. They examine in detail some of the problems implied by the interaction between translation, language and culture while providing both breadth and depth to the cultural dimension, an area which has strangely been neglected together with translation studies, despite their recognized importance, until the early eighties. Thus the authors make a cogent case for both translators and linguists to take a more active role as mediators between cultures, but they also intend to offer insights to anybody else working or living between cultures and wishing to understand more about their cross-cultural successes and frustrations.

From a purely didactical point of view, this book offers a thorough observation to university lecturers who are interested in introducing culture more effectively in their own teaching situations, be it language or translation. It is not by mere chance then that this selection brings together practical and theoretical material, which is presented throughout to illustrate potential problems and proposed strategies for dealing with them.

Of course, it is quite legitimate to wonder what the target readership of this collection is.

On the one hand it is expected it will receive a good response from undergraduate and postgraduate students, and English language and literature departments at large. Yet, given the substantial contribution of Slavic scholars, I can envisage that this book will be of particular interest to Slavic language and literatures departments. On the other hand we hope it will be welcome by general readers too as an introduction to the wealth and diversity of language and culture relations through the linguistic perspective of translation and language alike.

Before proceeding with a brief presentation of each chapter, I would just like to emphasise that the authors' insights into the complex phenomenon of cross-cultural communication is as interesting as fascinating, and perhaps even more so because the scholars, who have contributed to this book, come from various countries, including Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Latvia, Russia, Serbia, and Slovenia. Needless to say that one of the good things about this international co-operation is that owing to their different socio-cultural backgrounds, these scholars have contributed to producing an extremely varied picture of ways of approaching the challenge of a more and more globalised world, where the study of practical problems in human communication and language education, has become one of the key issues closely related to real life experience.

Nick Ceramella opens the book with an essay entitled, "Linking Theory With Practice: the Way to Quality Translation." He presents translation as a key to cross-cultural communication in our global society, while stressing the major role that the emergence of postcolonial literatures has played in the growth of translation studies, without neglecting a brief historical reconstruction of the need for building up a theory of translation.

This essay, resulting from Ceramella's extensive teaching experience at various Italian and foreign universities, is meant as a lively and friendly reading for anyone who teaches or studies translation whether at a theoretical or practical level. It addresses the need for a systematic approach to training in translation studies by drawing on some key cultural issues and linguistic theory and by relating them to a number of practical translation problems and strategies.

Natalya Reinhold, in "Translation and Mediation in Postmodern Mass Media Space: Problem Aspects," deals with translation as a form of intercultural communication, involving "the ways of (non)bringing the Other across in translation and thereby (non)diversifying the target culture." She wonders whether the current visual media-oriented order helps the mediation between the Other (in ST) and the I (in TC). On

writing about the significance of the “languages” of mediation in comparison with writing per se on social and ideological codes, she focuses on the implications of semiotic differences between verbal and visual systems. Ms Reinhold supports her opinion by making reference to some 20th century English writers who hinted at the possibility of developing a word culture, as opposed to the relationship between the rapid evolvement of visual and verbal signs, while stressing the different ways global media can have an impact on inter-cultural communication and literary translation as part of it. To shape her highly intellectual study she resorts to two postmodernist case studies: the Russian translation of *Night Train* (1997, 1999) by Martin Amis, and the English translation of Victor Erofeyev’s story “Zhen’kin Tezaurus” (1993, 1995).

Tomaž Onič, in his “Translation of Untranslatable Jokes: Linguistic and Cultural Barriers in Joke Translation,” writes about laughter as a general human characteristic and the ability to identify the cause of laughter in a text as essential for translators. He stresses these professionals must be able to spot the elements which cause or contribute to humorous effects in the text, and can also realize under what other necessary conditions that happens. Besides the identification of such elements, translators need to have the ability to reproduce an equivalent or similar combination of features enabling them to create a comparable effect in the target language. In this very essay, Onič suggests some possible ways of searching for solutions that could apply to certain apparently insoluble situations. However, it is crucial to be aware that, apart from the translator’s ability and skill, a successful result very much depends on the possibilities offered by the target language and culture.

Olja Jojić, on writing about “Componental Analysis in Translation of Material Culture Terms from English into Serbian,” argues that even if we accepted the absurd claim that languages were not a component of culture, they would still reflect certain cultural situations and concepts characterising their very nature. She argues that, with reference to that, perhaps the greatest difficulty translators need to tackle, while dealing with culture-bound texts, is the translation of words referred to as culture-specific or culture-bound. In her view, the problems arising on translating this kind of texts can be seen as a direct consequence of the fact that the “SL and TL items rarely have “the same meaning” in the linguistic sense; but they can function in the same situation.” Ms Jojić completes her work with a reference to the so-called cultural-focus on which the success of the translation of culture-bound texts depends.

Michelle Gadpaille, in “Culture for the Culturally Desensitized,” explores ways of challenging first-year translation students who perhaps

overestimate themselves with respect to their knowledge of English speaking cultures. She claims that, thanks to a controlled introduction to realistic items from English films, newspapers, advertisements, jokes, and cartoons, a first year course in Intercultural Studies prepares students to realise how much there is still left to learn and research even after the dictionary has provided them with the “translation” of certain items. Then, by focusing on the field of sport, Gadpaille’s essay shows how students can learn to decode layers of cultural allusions and connotations to a more culturally-sensitized meaning.

As the book unfolds, we have reached Part Two of it which, as hinted at above, is fully dedicated to language studies.

Allan James opens this part of the collection with his essay, “Language and Culture: Lingua Franca-Cultura Franca? Sublingua Franca, Supralingua Franca? International English and Issues of Form and Function,” in which he analyses some varieties of English, used as an international language (EIL), namely as a lingua franca (ELF), by focusing his attention on their formal characteristics and the linguo-cultural functions they meet, as well as on how far both these aspects have a close shared relationship. Then he argues that the language-culture associations can, within an EIL context, be approached through an analysis of the issues related to lingua franca-cultura franca, and its derivatives sublingua franca-subcultura franca and supralingua franca-supracultura franca.

James concludes by saying that an appropriately separate approach to language and culture and their reciprocal influence in a lingua franca context can shed light on the many implications of English as a global language.

Ana Vlaisavljević looks into the way a growing global dominance of English has led the ELT profession to try to identify certain cultural and social theories, underlying some teaching methods which have met with the western academic world’s approval. She analyses some differences in cultural values between British and Serbs in order to investigate the impact these imported modern practices have when applied to the Serbian educational system. Then she draws a broad picture of the most important studies available to offer an insight into the concept of cultural values. However, since she has based her study on G. J. Hofstede’s views, while carrying out research in London to assess value inconsistencies between British and Serbs, she pays particular attention to his work. Ms Vlaisavljević’s study, which presents some important methodological issues in ELT considered in relation to the examined cultural dimensions, represents a remarkable academic achievement.

Natalja Cigankova writes about academic culture on the World Wide Web. Her essay presents the study of thirty research articles in ten different disciplines published recently in academic on-line journals. She focuses her attention on particular linguistic and extralinguistic features characterising academic hypertext—medium, specific text structure, verbal expression, discourse functions of hyperlinked references, the use of images, as well as visual elements and colour. Cigankova starts by introducing the research questions and method. Then, she presents and discusses the analysis of the elements pertaining to electronic academic publications. Finally, the analysis of the collected data enables her to identify the most distinctive medium-specific means of expression and make recommendations for WWW academic writings.

Radmila B. Šević in her study, “New Tools in Historical Linguistics,” argues that although two hundred years have passed since comparative language studies have begun, a tenable theory of language change has not been produced yet. On moving from one stage to another in a given period, looking for the general theory of language change, which would account not only for its mechanisms but also, and above all, for its reason and rationale, she eventually comes to the conclusion that a global theory of language change is impossible as long as the observations of language phenomena remain limited to a single theoretical framework. In succession, going from the genealogical tree model to the wave theory, from the functionalist to the structuralist approach and the generative model, she claims that all of these have taken change as an exponent of one aspect only of language structure and/or function.

On concluding, Šević says that only the most recent theories about language change, which embrace social factors and variation and unite synchronic and diachronic observation, may be pointing in the right direction.

Biljana Čubrović, in her “Cultural and Linguistic Overlaps in Crnyanski’s *A Novel about London*,” analyses Miloš Crnjanski’s peculiar novel about a group of Russian emigrants who have recently arrived in London in the aftermath of World War II. Their epitome is Reppin, a high rank military, an unfortunate displaced man, who, like everybody else in his community, seems to have problems with the idiosyncratic nature of English and its pronunciation.

Ms Čubrović takes into account, from *A Novel About London*, those situations which create an atmosphere of alienation through the interplay of the cultural and linguistic affectivity of English and Slavs. This emotional link is seen both in graphological and phonological phenomena, in the speech and thoughts of Crnjanski’s main characters who tend to

overuse lots of words and phrases of English origin which create an effect of alienation.

As I am about to close this brief introduction, I hope I have drawn an overall picture of the theoretical assumptions of the scholars who have contributed to this volume. Chiefly, I have sought to stress that what is most noticeable from the evidence of their studies is that scholars today consider language and translation studies through a dynamic global process and beyond any preconceived design, or any strict set of theoretical prescriptions, which would otherwise lead them to ignore the global socio-cultural reality. The variety and complexity of these essays offer a fresh view, taking into due account the intercultural issue per se from a down to earth perspective, while bearing in mind the importance of the cultural background of each country.

From the essays included in this book, it is clear that the two traditions in the translation and language study-areas are closely related: both of them are presented with their merits and flaws, and come out as equally important. On the other hand the scholarly interest in language and translation studies is reflective of the on-going development of the many works produced. Indeed, they represent a clear relevance to current intellectual endeavors which seek to understand the struggle to communicate in the modern world – a struggle that can reveal so much to all of us committed to confronting with the ins and outs of such a complex global reality.

Finally, we all trust that by collecting these essays, we have met our primary aim that is to give scholars and students of translation and language alike the opportunity to share the results of a very successful, international, cultural event, and stimulate intellectual confrontation and circulation of ideas within the field of applied linguistic research.

Nick Ceramella
Rome 13th July 2007.

PART ONE
TRANSLATION STUDIES

LINKING THEORY WITH PRACTICE: THE WAY TO QUALITY TRANSLATION

NICK CERAMELLA

Building up a theory of translation

We live in what we can call a qualification-conscious society where the ability to practice most professions based on experience only is less and less accepted. Therefore, formal education accompanied by a systematic and appropriate academic training are two of the requirements needed to be officially recognised. In other words, to be considered a professional, one must have a sound academic background which invariably implies a theoretical component. This is indeed an important element making the difference between someone who, however good at his/her work is, perhaps has only a vocational training (e.g. an electrician or a nurse) as opposed to someone else who, although operating in the same professional area, has an academic training (e.g. an electrical engineer or a doctor). All of them have the relevant expertise to work in their fields, consisting in manual skills or theoretical knowledge, according to their respective background training. Yet, they know very well that the end result of their work depends on a good and well organised teamwork.

By contrast, unlike doctors and engineers, just to mention two of the most respected categories of professionals in our society, translators have always experienced frustration in their social expectations of being acknowledged as highly qualified people, while their social status has been way below their merits. In a way, they are the “pariah” among linguists, the equivalent to electricians and nurses in the field of language studies. It must be said, though, that the responsibility for this rather low consideration is also the translators’ themselves. In fact, especially those who have achieved a high level of competence, have traditionally underestimated how important it is to be aware of the ins and outs of the translating process, hence how relevant and needed the academic training is. To say it with a translator of worldwide reputation, the Italian Lanna Castellano, who in a study carried out in 1988, maintained:

Our profession is based on knowledge and experience. It has the longest apprenticeship of any profession. Not until thirty do you start to be useful as a translator, not until fifty do you start to be in your prime.”¹

As opposed to her thought provoking ideas, which, all in all, see theory and practice as equally important, even if she stresses the long time needed before we can say a translator is fully fledged, there is the position of those believing that only born geniuses can “naturally” become good translators, and that consequently academic training and perhaps not even practice are necessary. Also owing to such extreme positions, no wonder then if translators have traditionally tended to live in a world of their own with its codes of conduct accessible only to the “happy few.” In this way, translating was turned into a “mysterious” craft, which looked down on any relationship between the process and the translation itself as a product, while rejecting the possibility of becoming the object of an intellectual study like any of the disciplines coming under the broad definition of applied linguistics.

It is only in the past three decades that the situation has gradually changed thanks especially to the lead taken by British and American universities. While, I would like to stress that countries like Italy have just recently shifted from the “*Scuola interpreti e traduttori*” (“School of interpreters and translators” equivalent to a technical college) to the university, that is from dilettantism to professionalism, except for the odd exception you can come across around the country. It is only now that translators graduate, by taking a university degree, acquire a professional attitude, learn to have a grip on their profession and become aware of their choices on solving the many problems arising from their work. On the other hand, Translation Studies, as a new discipline, doesn’t have a long-standing academic tradition, it is a new field of research which emerged in the 1970s, when it began to be taken as a serious scientific area of studies mainly thanks to the contribution given in the late sixties and early seventies by such farsighted linguists as Eugene Nida, Michael Halliday and Peter Newmark, who laid the foundations of the so called Translation Studies.

During the 1980s, this discipline consolidated its position, while the interest in the theory and practice of translation was growing at a steady pace to become an autonomous discipline in its own right in the past few years. But why did it develop so quickly? Most linguists agree that a major impulse was given by the need to pull down the linguistic and cultural

¹ Lanna Castellano, “Get rich—but slow” (paper delivered at a Conference in London, UK, 1988).

barriers dividing human beings. In effect, it is true that in this new scenario, now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, translation has begun to play a key role in supporting the globalisation process and the exchange of all sorts of information through the use of the Internet, machine translation and technology; these in turn have deeply altered the complex relationship between translators, language and power. Moreover, translation is helping an unprecedented mass of people to travel about as tourists, professionals and workers, who often have to settle down in a new country, torn between the urgent need to communicate and the wish to keep their individuality and national background. We should not be surprised then if translation is now central to debates about language and cultural identity, stressing the role of translation and translators as necessary to safeguard and promote linguistic and cultural diversity in the changing geography of globalised societies. It is for this very reason that now, translation must be approached as a symbolic or material exchange among different populations and not as a merely linguistic or literary question.

This situation leads straight to another major issue which sets up against each other two contrasting ideas of the translator as it emerged along with post-colonial studies in the 1990s.

There is an image of the creative, visible translator, who helps intercultural exchanges, versus that of the translator seen as a manipulator of reality at the expense of the source cultures and languages dominated by the hegemony of the target cultures and languages. To say it with Manhasset Sengupta: “we remain trapped in the cultural stereotypes created and nurtured through translated texts.”² It is self-evident that this Indian theorist, like many of his colleagues from former British, French, Spanish and Portuguese colonies, condemns translation as a subtle instrument of predominance used to present a superior original and an inferior copy, mirroring the notion of the superior culture subduing the inferior one. In other words, this is one of the radical responses to colonialism, coming from post-colonial writers who call for a new definition of translation altogether. It is not fortuitous then that there is a growing tendency to rethink the role of the translator as equal to that of the writer, which comes as a consequence of the need to dissolve the inequality of status between the source and the target texts. This new position, by placing translators on the same footing as writers, supported among others by Peter Newmark, who says that “the main feature of

² Manhasset Sengupta, *Between Languages and Cultures. Translation and Cross-cultural Texts* (Pittsburgh and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 172.

translators is that they are writers,³ entitles them to overcome the traditional idea of the subservient, diligent, and faithful interpreter of a text, and expects him to be more daring in his attempt to allow the new text to live again in another language and culture. As a result, the translation process is quite rightly seen as a link bridging the gap between source and target texts, or rather, cultures. This is a new notion which implies the rejection of the translator, as being often unfaithful in his work (cf. “traduttore traditore”), but also reflects the current political and economic world changes involving cultural and geographical boundaries which can hardly continue to stand, at least, in the traditional terms we have known them. It follows that the translator’s role is comparable to that of the WWW as it were, thus stressing the need of a translating network where the use of automated translation, despite its drawbacks, is a vital element.⁴

At this point, I believe we can start drawing conclusions by declaring that all the above is meant to explain why the interest in Translation Studies has increased dramatically in the past three decades, as shown also by the many books and journals focusing on this area. It will suffice to mention the different theoretical approaches offered in the 1980s by such experts as Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiss with their *skopos* theory, Ernst-August Gutt with his relevance theory, or Gideon Toury with his studies on pseudo-translation.⁵ Then, in the 1990s, Mona Baker changed

³ Peter Newmark, *About Translation* (Adelaide: Multilingual Matters, 1996), 144.

⁴ See Nick Ceramella, “Automated Translation: Pros and Cons”, *Il Traduttore Nuovo*, Vol. LIX. Napoli: 2004, 73-86.

⁵ In 1978, Vermeer published *Ein Rahmen für eine allgemeine Translationstheorie* (A General Framework Theory of Translation), which paves the way to a new approach to Translation Studies and which was later known as *functionalism*.

Texts in Vermeer’s view should not be seen as the “sacred original”, and the “purpose” (from the Greek *skopos*) of the translation should not depend on the source text any more, but on the necessity and culture of the target readers. Although translators must be responsible for their work, they should be allowed to share their decisions with their recipients/clients in order to meet their interests. In this way, Vermeer placed translation in the context of sociolinguistic pragmatics.

Gutt’s “relevance theory” (i.e. cognitive-pragmatic theory) is based on the challenging idea of moving from semiotics to an inferential paradigm of communication, where translators infer the relevant information in the target language text. Its central claim is that given a comprehensive theory of inferential communication, there is no need for a special theory of translation. In brief, Gutt maintained that translators act as mediators between the cognitive environment of source and target language community, and by comparing them, they get them to

the perspective through her corpus-based translation research, while Toury himself emphasised the importance of fixing some translation rules to make the work of translators more scientific, although he said he was aware theorists have certain priorities which do not correspond to those of the translators. Yet we know there is a common denominator, the importance acknowledged to the cultural aspect of translation which involves people's way of life and thinking. This represents a turning point because language and society (i. e. culture) are considered as an inseparable combination. Lawrence Venuti was probably the first to analyse translation also from a cultural and historical point of view, and more specifically, as a "refraction" rather than a mirror of the original text. He rejected the concept of the linear translation process, based on the idea that translating was a matter of transferring words from one language into another, seen as an approach concerning exclusively European languages. On the contrary, he pointed out that, when a translation involved other languages outside this area, translators became aware of the problems inherent to other cultural and linguistic systems and also of the need to decode and then re-encode them. To say it with Lawrence Venuti: "Problems in translating are caused at least as much by discrepancies in conceptual and textual grids as by discrepancies in languages."⁶ Such a

converge in interlingual communication which depends in turn on the principle of relevance.

Toury declared that "translations are, in one way or another, facts of the target system". On saying that, he meant that the target or recipient culture gives the initial impulse to translate, therefore translators work mainly in the interest of the culture into which they are translating. He recommends an empirical approach where the study begins with the observed data, i.e. the translated texts and goes on with the reconstruction of non-observational facts rather than *vice versa* as is usually the case with the "corpus" based and traditional approaches to translation.

One of the most intriguing features of Toury's approach is the idea of "pseudo-translation," that is, the texts foisted off as translated while they are not. Toury assumes that for his procedure "translation" will be taken to be "any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on whatever grounds." In this approach, pseudo-translations are "just as legitimate objects for study within DTS [Descriptive Translation Studies] as genuine translations. They may prove to be highly instructive for the establishment of the general notion of translation as shared by the members of a certain target language community." Then, after verifying their acceptability in their respective target language system, Toury analyses the strategies used by translators and the concept of equivalence as seen by people in the target culture.

⁶ Lawrence Venuti, *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), 176.

clear cut position shows that there is no doubt that the Postcolonial Theory changed the concept of translation which began to be seen as an interdisciplinary field of research and not just as a sub-branch of linguistics. It must be said, however, that a major contribution to pulling down the barriers between disciplines was possible mainly thanks to the work based on linguistics and carried out by leading figures, including Roger Bell and Basil Hatim. This undoubtedly gave further impetus to Translation Studies to gain an independent and acknowledged status of its own. A major contribution to this result came from the realisation of Toury's polysystems theory, which shifted the long-lasting attention from faithfulness and equivalence towards the function of the translated text in its new social context. Thus it fulfilled both the communicative role and the continuity between different cultures, besides filling the gap between linguistics and literary studies, which provided the basis whereon the new interdisciplinary Translation Studies could grow.

It was clear by then that, in order to develop and create its own theory, translation needed to draw, like any other young discipline, from its specific related disciplines such as linguistics in its wide range of varieties: applied, structural, social, and psychological. But equally important, needed to bring together research into the practice and history of translation with these other intellectual trends. Due to the commitment and contribution given by so many scholars, translation is eventually seen as a many-sided and complex profession. Meanwhile, with the growth of a culture of translation, it is almost widely accepted that a translator needs to be aware about what happens when a text is transferred from a source to a target culture, as well as know what a language is and how it functions in its inter-actional use. Incidentally, this is where pragmatics (the latest area of research in linguistics) comes into play to explain how a language is used in its communicative function. In this context, analysing the linguistic apparatus in terms of discourse and structure, together with an analysis of construction and interpretation, hence linking linguistics with psychology, has proved to be quite important in the attempt to realise what translators do when they translate. Consequently, the techniques of linguistics, that is in practice the contribution of linguists, who are able to create a model through which they can demonstrate and explain what translators do in their work process, is of great value to translators themselves. And this is how they can gain a double awareness of the phases through which a text conversion goes through:

- translating is the activity itself;

- a translation is the end product of the creation process;
- translation, in abstract terms, includes both of the previous elements.

This model will not fail to place translation within the domain of human communication, so it will analyse it in terms of construction and interpretation, two key passages necessary to realise what translators do. Of course, this is a big step forward, yet, I think it is worth emphasising that we are still discussing an issue which, a far-seeing linguist, Michael Halliday, dealt with ever since 1961:

It might be of interest to set up a linguistic model of the translation process, starting not from any preconceived notions from outside the field of language study, but on the basis of linguistic concepts such as are relevant to the description of languages as modes of activity in their own right.⁷

As a result of all the above, linguists have managed to build up a solid theory of translation, good to describe both the process and the product, which is, to say it with Roger T. Bell, “valuable as a vehicle for testing theory and for investigating language use.”⁸ Indeed, this is the realization of what Susan Bassnett considers the purpose of translation theory, which in her view is meant

to reach an understanding of the processes undertaken in the act of translation and, not, as is so commonly misunderstood, to provide a set of norms for effecting the perfect translation.⁹

Then it is a matter of fixing what practical skills a good translator should have and how the outcoming sketch can be converted into a model of the translation process. In short, this results in a theory of translation (i.e. an abstract application on the perception of something observed) which is developed from the observation of the surrounding world (i.e. phenomena) and then is transmitted to other people in the form of a model,

⁷ Michael Halliday, “Linguistics and machine translation,” in *Patterns of Language: papers in general, descriptive and applied linguistics*, ed. Angus McIntosh and Michael A. K. Halliday (Harlow: Longman, 1961), 137.

⁸ Roger Bell, *Translation and Translating—Theory and Practice* (London: Longman, 1991), XVI.

⁹ Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (London: Methuen, 1980), 37.

that is an external explanation of the theory itself, its very realization (cf. a house plan seen as a representation of the house itself).

The next conclusion that can be drawn links all the above with the issues involved in creating a theory of translation, which will allow us to see how they arise from the following questions:

1. Is translation an art or a science?

We can say it is a science if we think of the translations done in highly specialised fields, like medicine, science, technology, law, etc. On the one hand, they necessarily require a good enough knowledge of these disciplines in order to produce quality translations, on the other one, due to their very exact nature they do not leave any room to linguistic creativity. Alternatively, the idea that translation is an art is still related to literary translation which, incidentally, reflects J. L. Malone's opinion: "The quintessence of translation as art is, if anything, even more patent in literary texts."¹⁰ But let's face it, from a practical standpoint a "translation" is just a product, a text rendered from one language into another. This approach leads quite naturally to the usually ignored query:

2. What is translating?

A simple straight forward answer can be that it is the process involved in achieving the final result. This in turn leads to the next question:

3. Does the translating process involve other disciplines like any other professional activity?

As we have amply said above, we know there is a consequent involvement of a multidisciplinary system which results in the building of a general theory of translation, hence in a model. Therefore, we can quite legitimately wonder:

4. What competence must translators possess in order to be able to translate?

They need an abstract linguistic knowledge and practical skills (e. g. using a pc).

¹⁰ Joseph Malone, *The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), 2.

And here is the final question:

5. What do translators do when they translate?

This seems to be a simple question to answer. Yet it is not so, if for no other reason because there is not a Unique Way to tackle a translation. On the contrary, it depends on a variety of different elements, including among others:

- ability to decode and re-encode,
- experience,
- motivation,
- psychological attitude towards the text (i.e. whether the text is liked or disliked),
- competence and knowledge of the topic, the level of the difference between the two grammars, syntaxes, lexis, cultures, that are involved.¹¹

A close look at these parameters shows that it is impossible to say there is an “ideal” way of approaching a translation. Even more so, for the purpose of this essay, let’s focus our attention on two factors only, implying that translators/students

a) tackle the problem of the meaning of words and sentences. In other words they have to catch their “semantic sense;”

b) take into due account the communicative value of the text, involving concepts like roles, mood, theme, indicators of dialect, markers of style, and the components of the context of situation which can be classified as follows:

- tenor, referring to the social relationships between the people participating in the discourse, e.g. mother and son, or employer and employee. In such cases, the use of an appropriate tone and register are vital choices a translator has to make;

¹¹ Nick Ceramella, “Translation Issues From a Didactical Perspective and Approaches to a Didactic Methodology of Translation,” in *Reading Across Borders: Papers in Language and Literary Studies*, eds. M. Knežević and A. Nikčević-Batričević. (Nikšić: Faculty of Philosophy, 2006), 20.

- mode, referring to the medium used, e.g. spoken, written, and the circumstance, e.g. speech, letter. This involves the recognition of different text-types which requires different varieties of style and vocabulary;
- domain/field, referring to what is happening in the context of situation on which depends the varying ways people use language.

Major practical issues on translating

Word level equivalence

Human beings are the only living species who can speak in many different languages to communicate among themselves, but this is, at the same time, a great limitation because they are unable to understand what other individuals say. If you think about it, this is the very barrier that has created the need to translate from one language into another, even when it seems there is a direct word equivalence as shown by the following examples.

If we take the word *madre* (in Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish), corresponding to *mother*, *mère*, *Mutter* (in English, French, and German respectively), we find that its connotational meaning recalls the same idea of tenderness and care in all of them. Nevertheless, the word *mamma* in Italy—where there is some sort of cult of the mother figure—has a particular connotation to it, stressing a very special relationship between mother and child. Take as a case in point, “Ah! Mamma mia!”¹², two words that a stabbed to death Turiddu, the protagonist of Giovanni Verga’s “Cavalleria Rusticana,” can hardly utter. G. H. McWilliam most wisely left them in Italian in a recent re-edition of this short story,¹³ which I believe is a good choice, representing a strongly culturally-marked case which shows that translating is far from just looking words up in a dictionary. Therefore, the “equation” $y = z$ is an over-simplistic and illusory correspondence in translation terms.

¹² Giovanni Verga, “Cavalleria rusticana,” in *Tutte le novelle*, ed. Marco Buzzi Maresca (Milano: Mursia, 1986), 235.

¹³ Giovanni Verga, “Cavalleria Rusticana,” in *Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2000), 33.

Lexical meaning

We can distinguish among a variety of meanings. I would like to start with the lexical meaning which marks the difference between words. This is the meaning words acquire through usage in a certain country and within its linguistic system. By way of example, if you take *nice*, you will realise it may be used to talk positively of several different things in Britain, as shown by George Mikes—a Hungarian journalist who lived two-thirds of his life in England—in his *How to be an Alien*:

If you live here [in England] long enough you will find out to your greatest amazement that the adjective *nice* is not the only adjective the language possesses, in spite of the fact that in the first three years you do not need to learn or use any other adjectives. You can say that the weather is nice, a restaurant is nice, Mr Soandso is nice, Mrs Soandso's clothes are nice, you had a nice time, and all this will be very nice.¹⁴

This brings to mind David A. Cruse's theory, where he distinguishes four main types of meaning in words and utterances: *propositional*, *expressive*, *presupposed*, and *evoked*:

Propositional, involving how appropriately a certain word is used. If one says—"he wore a pair of *gloves* on his feet"—shows that the word *gloves* has been used inappropriately. Similarly, an "inaccurate" translation often involves propositional meaning.

Expressive, referring to the user's mood and attitude. If we compare *don't complain* and *don't moan*, although they share the same lexical meaning, the latter implies that "one is complaining annoyingly, especially in a discontent voice without good reason".

Presupposed meaning, implying there are certain restrictions, concerning words and expressions, we expect to see with a particular term. These restrictions can be either:

- *collocational*, following no propositional logicity as such, e.g. *You can't have your cake and eat it* which, by comparison, reads so differently in Italian, *non si può avere la botte piena e la moglie ubriaca* = "you can't keep your cask full and get your wife drunk";

¹⁴ George Mikes, "The Language," in *How to be an Alien* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 22.

- *selectional* restrictions are those imposing that a given term can only be used with a certain category of words unless it is employed figuratively. For instance, we usually expect the term *tondo* to collocate with anything having a round shape in Italian, but metaphorically it can be used to talk about a *naïve* person, or, even with other expressions like *a tutto tondo* (“in full relief”), and so on.

Evoked meaning, deriving from *dialect* and *register*.

Dialect can be arranged in the following classes:

- *geographical*, referred to the country/area where English is spoken. Compare the American English, “apartment” and “subway” with the British flat and *underground/tube*;
- *social*, referred to words and expressions employed according to class; e.g. “to wine and dine”, used by the upper class v. “to have a meal and wine” used by the average person in the street.
- *temporal*, referred to words and phrases used in accordance with age, e. g. *hallo/hi* (very informal usage in introduction); or, with different historical periods, e.g. *thrice* (i.e. “three times”) usually classified by dictionaries as *old use*. An example of the latter that I can think of, is Alfred Tennyson’s line, “Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers.”¹⁵

Register, as already hinted at above, varies according to field of discourse, tenor and mode. A translator has to be extremely careful with register because the kind of language expected to be used varies from country to country, while the receivers may even be offended if exposed to a level of language they may consider too high for them (see a business meeting). So, the best thing to do is to adapt the translation to the register expectations of the target language, unless the translator is advised, by whomever has commissioned the job, to give just the flavour of the source culture, which is indeed not always so easy as it may sound.

¹⁵ Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam*. Edited by Erik Gray (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2004), 32, 13.

Non-equivalence at word level

The problem of non-equivalence at word level generally depends either on extra-linguistic factors, or strictly linguistic ones. While translating, one is likely to come across words that have no equivalent in the target language, therefore, a particular strategy is needed to handle them as best as possible. This involves various conceptual distinctions:

- a) sense and reference
- b) hyponymy, synonymy and antonymy
- c) connotation and denotation
- d) proposition, sentence and utterance

The techniques that can be used to deal with them vary according to the conceptual analysis for the specification of word meaning, the realisation of lexical and semantic fields, and the measurement of connotative meaning using the technique of the semantic differential. See below some common types of non-equivalence at word level classifiable as:

a. *Loan words*

This is the case when a word is used in the original form also in other languages. For example, *dolce vita* is not translated into English, and similarly, *leader* (in politics) and *corner* (in football) are not translated into Italian. And there is neither a word for *pizza* nor for the French *menu*, nor for the English *snack-bar*, anywhere in the world. This is because the concept is clear without being lexicalised in the target language.

A special loan translation is represented by a *calque*, which is a literal translation of a word, e.g. *volleyball* / *pallavolo*. Loan words may be used in the source text to add a touch of elegance to it, create a stylistic effect, or give it a touch of authenticity; it goes without saying then, translators have to be very careful in trying to render them into another language. They may come across words which have no equivalent in the target language, therefore, they should not give for granted that they can be translated.

Loan words inevitably cause a problem to the inexperienced translator, especially when s/he bumps into the so-called *false friends*, those words sharing the same form in different languages while conveying different meanings. In short, they may have a similar spelling or sound but not necessarily their meanings too, e.g. *actually* does not mean *attualmente* [*presently*] in Italian, but *infatti*. The very common Italian word *simpatico* has an equivalent in French *sympathique*, but not in English where

sympathetic does not mean *nice/likeable*, but refers to someone feeling or showing sympathy, or is used with reference to a pleasant/congenial atmosphere. Another good example is *sensible* which can be confused with the Italian *sensibile*, the French *sensible*, and the German *sensibel*, all meaning “sensitive”, whereas the correspondent term to the English *sensible* is *ragionevole*, *raisonable*, *vernünftig* / *anständig* respectively.

b. *Culture-bound concepts*

As I said in the first part of this essay, in an increasingly cross-cultural world, there is a growing awareness of the role of culture in Translation Studies where translators are seen as active mediators between two cultures. It is acknowledged that the meaning of a text depends on how knowledgeable a translator is about both the source and the target culture.

<i>The Economist</i>	<i>My translation</i>
Exultant representatives of the <i>centre-right</i> , which is led by [...] former <i>prime minister</i> , Silvio Berlusconi, [...] Mr Berlusconi’s <i>chief whip</i> in the <i>upper house</i> cried: “[...] The Prodi government has fallen in this <i>chamber</i> .” When news reached the <i>lower house</i> , the <i>Chamber of Deputies</i> , scuffles broke out between government and opposition.	<i>Rappresentanti esultanti del centro-destra, guidato dal [...] precedente presidente del consiglio, Silvio Berlusconi, [...] Il capo gruppo al senato ha urlato: “[...] Il governo Prodi è caduto in questo senato.”</i> <i>Quando la notizia ha raggiunto il parlamento, la Camera dei deputati, sono scoppiati piccoli tafferugli tra governo e opposizione.</i>

This brief cutting from *The Economist* (24th Feb 2007) is an example of how texts may make use of target culture frames to help the reader associate them with his/her cultural background; it is evident that through target culture analogy, the source culture can be more fully understood. Hence, all the underlined words above had to be rendered through analogous terms pertaining to the Italian political lexicon. It is noticeable though that, due to a deliberate choice of the reporter, some of them sound more like those used in the Italian system than in the British. On giving a closer look we find that, *Deputy* is a member of the lower house in countries, such as Italy and France, while it is called *Member of Parliament* in Britain and *Congressman/woman* in the US. Likewise, *centre-left*, which refers to the political area going from the moderate centre to the left (cf. *centre-right*), is one of those things characterising government coalitions, which are so common in European countries like Italy. Note that *chamber* in BrE refers to both the House of Commons (i.e.