

A Question on Translation

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How will a translator approach these two works? Could the concept of "text", as defined above, be applied to the two of them?

In *Finnegans Wake*, we have a whole system of (a new system, or at least, a different system) language units, but is there a topic? Is a topic necessary to produce a work of art? Can we differentiate character from topic in the case of H.C.E. (Earwicker)?

In *Act without Words*, we can certainly define language units leading to act out; and the topic, is it the character and his gestures?

Communication is also a major point. Based on Jakobson's model of communication we have a sender, a receiver, a message and a channel. Which is the place of the translator within this model? He is receiver and sender. He is also the channel through which the message is conveyed. He decodes the message to re-encode it into the language of the receiver who cannot read the original language in which the text was written.

In *Finnegans Wake*, the senders are the author and the translator; reader and translator are the receivers; the translator's knowledge of the original language of the text and the language into which it is translated are the channels. And the message? What is the translator decoding and re-encoding when he translates *Finnegans Wake* and how.

If we are to apply Jakobson's model of communication to *Act without Words* more questions will arise. The senders are the author, the translator (in Beckett's work he is himself author and translator), and the player; the receivers are the reader and the audience; the channel: the original language, the translation language and the gestures, the acting; the text is the written words and the performance of the player. The same question is posed for this work as in the paragraph above, what is the translator decoding and re-encoding and how?

Earwicker's thoughts and the performance of Beckett's player transcend grammar. It follows that morphological and syntactical structure of language are in these two great works of minor importance for the translator, as he has to consider greater problems here, as they are, among others, time and space.

Beckett's player is situated in an ever present tense in an empty spatial dimension. *Finnegans* is the present state of the past of a man who will wake or resurrect to continue dreaming or remembering in an eternally repeating cycle; the character is situated in an out-of-space dimension.

With Joyce's *degré n de l'écriture* and Beckett's *degré zéro de l'écriture* we arrive at a moment in which literary theories become obsolete, and as consequence a new theory of translation is needed.

What would be the main points of the new theory:

- a theory that would focus on the sense and the non-sense rather than the contents;
- a theory centered on the sound and the rhythm of language, as representing the sound and the rhythm of life (With Joyce and Beckett we have two different views of life, so two ways of

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Techniquement, selon la définition de Roman Jakobson, le «poétique» (c'est-à-dire le littéraire) désigne ce type de message qui prend sa propre forme pour objet, et non ses contenus.

Roland Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue*, Paris, Seuil, p. 15.

Jakobson's notion of the *littéraire* calls for a revision of the theory of language; therefore, of translation. Up to now, the problem of translation has been treated either from a semantical or from a syntactical point of view, — or a combination of both —, within a text. By definition, a text is a set of properly organized language units, obviously, within a specific topic.

Consider as examples: James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Samuel Beckett's *Act without Words*. We have then, two different literary works: one, we call a novel, the other a play (a play to be acted out, not to be talked).

expressing the different rhythms within the act of writing);

- a theory that would lay great emphasis on the language produced in the interstices of thought, that is to say in silences.

Thus, in our new theory the translator needs not dwell on the special linguistic nature of the poetic language; he ought to go farther, onto the “statis” of poetic language, onto the signs produced by it. The post-literature will certainly be a word-image literature. Then, the work of the translator will be the transposition of signs from one culture into another, from one sensitivity into another. He will need to call for a semiotical theory of translation.

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