



Presentation

Denise Merkle

Volume 15, Number 2, 2e semestre 2002

Censure et traduction dans le monde occidental
Censorship and Translation in the Western World

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/007476ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/007476ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN

0835-8443 (print)

1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Merkle, D. (2002). Presentation. *TTR*, 15(2), 9–18.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/007476ar>

Presentation

[T]he activities of translator and censor are in many ways related. Both are gatekeepers, standing at crucial points of control, monitoring what comes in and what stays outside any given cultural or linguistic territory. And just as censors have to resolve how best to restrict access to information considered detrimental to the public in whose interests they presume to act, so too do translators have to resolve what tactics to adopt when presenting to the TL reading public new information and fresh forms coming in from the outside.¹

Censorship refers broadly to the suppression of information in the form of self-censorship, boycotting or official state censorship before the utterance occurs (preventive or prior censorship) or to punishment for having disseminated a message (post-censorship, negative or repressive censorship). In its narrower legalistic sense, it means prevention by official government act of the circulation of messages already produced, or a system of direct official constraints on publication. The term is applied to both original texts and translations, although the distinction between the two is rarely made in the literature. Depending on a society's view of human nature, censorship is rooted either in the fear that a message will do harm to an individual or to society as a whole through the corruption of personal morality or in the Freudian belief that unless fear is instilled in society's members primal drives leading to the unravelling of social cohesion will be unleashed, the ultimate aim of censorship being that each individual become his own censor,² since self-censorship assures indirect pressure to social conformity. Even the freest of nations seem to find some form(s) of censorship necessary; as such censorship is not limited to oppressive

¹ Michael Holman and Jean Boase-Beier, "Introduction" in *The Practices of Literary Translation: Constraints and Creativity*, eds. Jean Boase-Beier and Michael Holman, Manchester (U.K.), St Jerome Publishing, 1999, p. 11.

² Jean-Paul Valabrega, "Fondement psycho-politique de la censure," *Communications « Censure »*, 9, Paris, Seuil, 1967, p. 116.

autocracies as Michaela Wolf asserts in her study on the blockage of Italian alterity in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The articles on censorship and translation brought together in this issue confirm that censorship, more specifically translation phenomena found in censoring societies, are not the exclusive purview of explicitly autocratic regimes, a position upheld by Raquel Merino and Rosa Rabadán in their article “Censored Translations in Franco’s Spain: The TRACE Project – Theatre and Fiction (English-Spanish).” Although pseudo-translation, genre cloning and intersemiotic chains, for example, were more prevalent under Franco than they are today in democratic Spain, they are not restricted to an official censored context. Moreover, works that do not reproduce an imposed socio-political ideology, in particular translated works that by definition are products of different, often incompatible, socio-political ideologies are not necessarily as heavily censored as citizens of the “free” Western world tend to believe, and what is in fact censored is not what one would have necessarily expected. Jane Dunnett affirms in “Foreign Literature in Fascist Italy: Circulation and Censorship” that, despite preventive censorship and police confiscation, Mussolini’s efforts to control print were only partially successful as case studies of American literature translated into Italian show. She concludes that the regime failed to implement a hermetically sealed censorship policy for translations despite its desire to influence the way readers interpret books.

Whereas official censorship imposed by autocratic or new regimes is usually easily identified, the ebb and flow of official state censorship following the strength or weakness of the regime in power, the covert censorship at work in the free democracies of late modernity characterized by expanding globalization, though at times more difficult to detect, is nonetheless, at times insidiously, pervasive. Yves Gambier’s article “Les censures dans la traduction audiovisuelle,” for example, discusses multiple censorial strategies, in the West and the North in particular, from film classification to dubbing and sub-titling, among others, at work in cinema and television translation, two media closely scrutinized by censorial mechanisms because of their broad public appeal. When it comes to the censorship of the arts, dramatic works and the cinema have always attracted greater censorial interest, a point made by both Gambier and Merino/Rabadán in their contributions.

Overtly repressive situations, such as Soviet-dominated Poland, invite subversive resistance on the part of translators as Teresa Tomasziewicz demonstrates in her article. In “La traduction des textes déjà censurés,” Tomasziewicz explains that Pope Jean Paul II self-censored the homilies he prepared for his first visit to then communist Poland. Polish translators working with foreign journalists wished to give non-native speakers full access to the meaning of the Pope’s multi-layered, and subversive, SLTs understood fully only by Polish speakers. Translators here were working “out of a more restrictive into a less restrictive environment”.³ In contrast, translators may also work “out of a less into a more restrictive environment,”⁴ the reality of translators working in Franco’s Spain, Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy who had to deal with the censorial mechanisms⁵ operating within the publishing industry that are examined by Merino/Rabadán, Sturge and Dunnett, respectively.

Considered a social good or ill depending on why it is used and how it is applied, censorship in one form or another has always been with us, though its definitions and the institutions and mechanisms that enforce it have changed over time. According to the SOED,⁶ censor is first attested in 1533, the meaning “[a]n official whose duty it is to inspect books, journals, plays, etc., *before publication*, to secure that they shall contain nothing immoral, heretical, or offensive or injurious to the State [my italics]” dating back to 1644. Today, we generally understand censorship to include preventive (prior) censorship and punitive (post, repressive) censorship. The terms preventive and prior censorship tend to be used to some extent interchangeably. The same applies to punitive, post and

³ Jean Boase-Beier and Michael Holman, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵ Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995, p. 278.

⁶ William Little *et al.*, eds., *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, London, Oxford University Press, 1933, 1972 (3rd edition, revised & addenda). The abbreviation SOED refers to the 1972 edition of this dictionary. All quotations are from page 282.

repressive (or negative) censorship. Nevertheless, preventive, punitive and repressive are obviously more emotionally charged than the neutral prior and post. Prior censorship prevents the publication of a work or, in the case of self-censorship on the part of the translator, for example, re-writes it before it is published.

During wartime, when the State feels particularly vulnerable, printed matter is generally controlled with particular rigour for fear that the revelation of sensitive information may aid an enemy. Here the good of the State drives the censorial impulse.

Yet, tighter control may be enforced by enemy forces occupying the territory of a vanquished people eager to reclaim its national autonomy, in the effort to impose the values of the foreign occupier. Creative translators may choose to self-censor their target texts to enable the translation to appear in print, thereby subverting the enemy. Jean-Marc Gouanvic's "John Steinbeck et la censure: le cas de *The Moon is Down* traduit en français pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale" studies this particular translation situation involving prior censorship that curtails what may be said and written. In his essay, Gouanvic explores the transfer of available options from the political field (Bourdieu's *champ*) to the literary field in Nazi-occupied France. The degree to which two translations, one published in neutral Switzerland and one in occupied France, internalized political dictates and were subjected to prior censorship is studied.

André Lefevere identifies a "good" that may result from censorship, asserting in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* that the salvation of a literary work may be found in mutilation through rewriting.⁷ In "Desfontaines travesti," Benoit Léger examines the first French importation through rewriting of a work by Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1743), made by Pierre-François Guyot Desfontaines at a time when the novel genre was not considered high literature in France. The French translator adopted the persona of "*Une Dame angloise*," which allowed him to criticize in his paratext Fielding's novel as well as the customs of his French contemporaries. Desfontaines imported a genre

⁷ André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 150-160 (Chapter 12, "Editing").

that was not held in high esteem in the target system, his innovation through translation subverting French literary tradition.

In addition, imperialistic and colonial ideology can drive the censorial impulse. In “La Louisiane : une trahison américaine,” Anne Malena studies John Davis’ 1806 translation from the French of an anonymous travelogue (1803), placing it within the ideological context of the Louisiana Purchase. Davis’ “colonial” rewriting involving both cuts and additions to the original text attenuates Louisiana’s link to France in order to make the region more attractive to potential American investors. This is an extreme example of a source-language text being consciously manipulated by its translator to advance target culture interests.

Post-censorship, often resulting in seizure or banning, occurs after the work has been made public. Those societies that have been most confident of their principles and of the loyalty of their members have allowed the greatest freedom from censorship, for they have been least fearful of moral subversion and the consequences of dissent. Many of the essays in this issue, especially those by Jane Dunnett, Jean-Marc Gouanvic, Raquel Merino and Rosa Rabadán, and Kate Sturge, examine prior and post censorship in twentieth-century authoritarian and autocratic regimes marked by a lack of confidence in the uncompromising loyalty of their members. In these regimes, what is considered seditious is targeted; for example, Kate Sturge examines the qualitative changes in the translation market in Nazi Germany resulting from aggressive State intervention: Jewish and anti-Nazi authors, translators and publishers disappeared, the State enforcing “negative censorship” (banning) and “voluntary” self-regulation in the aim of imposing a worldview that reproduced Nazi ideology and eliminated dissenting voices. In situations where Church (or religion) and State share political control, i.e., Franco’s Spain and modern-day Iran, blasphemy, sedition, and often obscenity, are closely associated and become the target of censorship. In today’s Western world, overt censorship is directed primarily against the dissemination of hate and obscenity, especially pornography involving children and women. All in the name of the public good.

How can a phenomenon that has such far-reaching (and under-researched) implications for linguistic and cultural transfer be explained? Censorship has been practised in both the narrower and

broader senses as long as there has been organized culture, though the current epistemological interest in the phenomenon can be attributed to Freud who linked censorship to latent and universal feelings of guilt.⁸ From 433 BC, one of the functions of ancient Rome's elected censors was to investigate and correct the state of public morality, the function disappearing in AD 84. In 1592, the censor supervised "the conduct of a body of people, as in some colleges" (SOED). Public morality, or the values that regulate conduct in society, determine its members' habits of behaviour, or a social norm, often through repression (State) or guilt (religion). Freud's rich psychoanalytic legacy has strongly marked the reflection on social organization of a number of twentieth-century thinkers, Marcuse and Bourdieu, to name only two, having explored the relationship between repression (censorship) and civilization/society from Marxist and sociological perspectives, respectively. Taking their inspiration from Freud, it is their position that repression and censorship are inevitable elements of social organization, Freud having taught us that morality is to culture what repression is to the individual.

In *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse writes that civilization begins when the complete satisfaction of needs is renounced and results in the struggle against the desire for freedom.⁹ The law imposes the renouncing of certain needs in keeping with the dictates of morality, that is, what a given culture recognizes as the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, what is acceptable and unacceptable. When most individuals (e.g., translators) comply with little resistance, through repression (i.e., covert self-censorship), to the constraints in force, the perpetuation of a social order (i.e., worldview) is ensured, the minority that resists being subjected to various forms of socially imposed constraint (e.g., prior and post censorship). Laws (e.g., codes of social and professional conduct) impose constraints on individuals to ensure the enforcement of a moral code in keeping with the requirements of Freud's reality principle that takes the form of law and order. A civilization's "repressed" members transmit the requirements of the reality principle to the next generation. Nevertheless, what civilization masters and represses continues to exist

⁸ Jean-Paul Valabrega, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, New York, Vintage Books, 1962, pp. 11-15.

in civilization, its surfacing calling out for the implementation of one form or another of overt censorship.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu places censorship in a social context, making the distinction between periods of (political) stability and periods of rapid change in *Le sens pratique*. During periods of political stability, for example, when social conditioning is complete in the form of a disposition to act and think in certain ways, the *habitus* ensures the perpetuation of the dominant discourse, without having to resort to coercive measures.¹⁰ However, during periods of rapid change, when the internalization of the dominant discourse and the cultural habitat is as yet incomplete, formal rules, laws and explicit norms take over in order to consolidate the power of those who dominate. Censorship also operates on another level, for whether the political situation is stable or undergoing change, society's members achieve domination by having themselves endowed with the official right to visibility and audibility, as opposed to the dominated, that is, the occult, hidden, secret, unofficial, shameful, and, consequentially, censured and silenced.¹¹ Bourdieu affirms that exclusion from communication and from groups authorized to communicate is prior censorship (*censure préalable*).¹²

On the one hand, in "Censure et la mise en forme," Bourdieu links censorship and norms in discourse.¹³ First, the structure of the field (*champ*), and not some legal entity constituted especially to point out and repress transgressions of the linguistic code, controls discourse by controlling both the access to the means of expression and the form that expression takes. Second, structural censorship is imposed on all producers of symbolic goods, including authorized spokespersons whose words are submitted first and foremost to the norms of official propriety, while it condemns the dominated to choose between silence and non-normative discourse.¹⁴

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris, Minuit, 1980, p. 91.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, "Censure et mise en forme" in *Ce que parler veut dire*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1982, p. 169.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-205.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

On the other hand, in *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (DTSB), Gideon Toury shows the link between norms and censorship in translation. Mona Baker explains that in his view, norms are the options that translators as members of a community living in a given socio-historical context select on a regular basis,¹⁵ for the translator is a member of a community with shared values, norms and practices.

The translator fulfils a function specified by the community and has to do so in a way that is considered appropriate in that community. Acquiring a set of norms for determining what is appropriate translational behaviour in a given community is a prerequisite for becoming a translator within that community.¹⁶

Thus, it is not unexpected for Toury to write in DTSB: “[translators] simply operat[e] within different socio-cultural settings and hence ha[ve] different norms as guidelines for their translational behaviour”¹⁷. Norms, in turn, may spark the “activation of *purification* [Toury’s italics]” of a translation by a translator or a non-translator through the implementation of various censorial mechanisms, as Toury explains:

[Censorial] mechanisms are often resorted to post factum, after the act of translation has been terminated, by way of [post]-editing, whether by the translator him-/herself or by some other agent, who may have had a different kind of training and was charged with other responsibilities. Often, such a reviser is not even required to know the source language, and even if s/he does, it is not necessarily the case that s/he also falls back on it. Censorship can also be activated during the act of translation itself though, inasmuch as the translator has *internalized* the norms pertinent to the culture, and uses them as a constant monitoring device.¹⁸

¹⁵ Mona Baker, “Norms” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker, New York and London, Routledge, 2001, p. 164.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁷ Gideon Toury, *op. cit.* p. 277.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

In “Norme et censure : ne pas confondre,” Louise Brunette tackles the thorny issue of norms and censorship in professional translation. She argues that, rather than censors, reviewers and revisers are the guardians of translation quality. Translation quality assessment, or the codification of professional translation norms, allows for the objective assessment of translation quality and ensures that translators respect evolving professional norms. When internalized by the professional translator, translation quality norms buttress social cohesion.

For her part, Michaela Wolf explores the concept of cultural blockage and its role as a guardian of cultural tradition in the Habsburg Monarchy. Stephen Greenblatt’s theory of blockage of cultural products is used to understand cultural transactions. For Greenblatt cultures are “inherently unstable, mediatory modes of fashioning experience”¹⁹ requiring constant exclusion or blockage to maintain stability and cultural identity. The Habsburg Monarchy blocked subversive elements through exclusion procedures; for example, through text selection aimed at minimizing the destabilizing of Austro-Hungarian identity, patrons, editors, publishers and reviewers loyal to the Monarchy blocked exposure to Italy’s nationalistic discourse that was calling for political autonomy from Habsburg rule.

Repression, morality, blockage, *habitus*, norms: the many guises of the control of discourse invariably implicate the translating subject and his or her reception of the same and the other within a given socio-historical situation. Boase-Beier and Holman present the translator’s options in the opening quotation: Will s/he choose to domesticate the foreign or to act as an agent of innovation? In light of the preceding discussion, we believe it necessary to add the following question: To what extent is the translator, as a product of social conditioning, free to choose?

This collection of essays has been devoted exclusively to the presentation of research findings on the theme of censorship and translation. And it appears clear that the research possibilities are far from exhausted. As the title indicates, the geographical scope of this issue of *TTR* is limited to the Western experience. Thus, in addition to

¹⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 121, in Michaela Wolf.

providing an overview of current research,²⁰ this issue aims to encourage the broadening of the historical and geographical scope of research on the topic.

Denise Merkle
Université de Moncton

²⁰ A number of contributors have published books and articles on censorship, the result in at least one case of a systematic, large-scale research programme (Spain's TRACE project, directed by Raquel Merino and Rosa Rabadán), and some authors have concentrated doctoral research on the subject of censorship and translation (e.g., Jane Dunnett, Kate Sturge).