TTR
Traduction, terminologie, rédaction

Presentation

Natalia Teplova

Cite this document

Presentation

Natalia Teplova

In his groundbreaking book *Poétique du traduire* (Verdier, 1999), Henri Meschonnic paints a masterly portrait of a Europe born out of, and within, translation (specifically of the Bible). At the same time, he cannot help but observe that a knowledge of how non-Western traditions translate and relate to their fundamental texts is also necessary to the understanding of the world. Meschonnic mentions Japan in this context, which he views as a country of continuity, while acknowledging that more study is necessary in order to define the Japanese translation tradition.

Indeed, with the beginning of the so-called "post-colonial" period in the second half of the 20th century, the discourse of Translation Studies in the West turns to a space beyond Western boundaries, allowing for the emergence of the "Other." However, despite a general interest in otherness, some languages-cultures remain relatively unknown and unstudied. These gaps in the discipline tend to reinforce the stereotypes that exist within these "incommensurable spaces."

Therefore, ten years after Mechonnic made this observation, we believe that there is still much to be done to demystify Japan and its translation practices and thought. We must acknowledge that despite the curiosity the country and its traditional and popular culture inspire, Translation Studies scholars have not yet methodically examined the question of "Translation in Japan." And yet, translation, as praxis, played a fundamental role in the construction of the "Self" and "Other" that Japan presents today. It was through translation, over the centuries, that Japan developed its writing system, imported

scientific knowledge, constructed its political system and defined its "national character."

Thus, the main aim of this issue is to explore the space of Japanese language-culture through the eyes of Translation Studies researchers who specialize in this area of study. Without aspirations of exhaustivity (an unattainable goal), we would like to present seven case studies focusing on different topics and covering key moments in Japanese cultural and political history, from the Yamato period to the 21ˢᵗ century. We chose to follow a diachronic approach in presenting the papers; hence the chronological order pertaining to content was selected.

We begin with an essay by Yanabu Akira,[1] who proposes the concept of a "cassette effect" to explain the way Chinese characters (called *kanji*) are introduced and used in Japan. This concept refers to the fascination held by an unknown object whose meaning remains hidden for its first users. However, as time passes, *kanji* are transformed by the host culture, with the aim of making them distinct from the original Chinese characters. Thus, Japanese meaning and pronunciation are infused into the *kanji*, and a two-*kanji* coinage system is developed, among others, to create a writing system that mixes *kanji* and *Yamatokotoba* (traditional Japanese language).

The two-*kanji* coinage system is particularly interesting. As Yanabu explains, sometimes, in two-*kanji* words, form is more important than meaning. Even if three or more *kanji* are needed to express a borrowed word through translation, the number of *kanji* that are used drops to two, due precisely to the dominance of the two-*kanji* coinage system. Thus, it is through memorization more than through analysis that new words are retained and used by the Japanese. And since, for historical reasons, *kanji* are treated with reverence in Japan, two-*kanji* words, no matter how obscure they might seem at first, are viewed as important and serious, both in their written form and aurally. Like their predecessors in the Yamato era who brought *kanji* to Japan, Meiji period

---

1 We follow the Japanese name order where the last name is followed by the first name.

scholars used *kanji* to make up words expressing native as well as foreign material objects and abstract concepts. This feeling of foreignness, and thus attractiveness that the *kanji* evoke remains today. According to Yanabu, it is a positive phenomenon, as it can bring cultures closer together.

Mizuno Akira goes beyond the example of fascination with the foreign and translation practices on a lexical level to tackle the complex question of literal translation during the time in which translated literature occupied an important if not a superior position in the literary polysystem of a Japan in search of modernization. As he explains, up until the middle of the Meiji period, foreign works were translated freely, with the emphasis placed on content. However, beginning in the late 1880s, a literal approach dominated translation practices, meaning that the form was also taken into account. Some translators mixed a literal strategy with other methods, while others followed the original so closely their translations became almost unintelligible. As a result, literal translation contributed to the unification of the spoken and the written language and to the modification of such concepts as "nature" and "beauty." Several writers chose to imitate the style of literary translations in their own works.

Through a careful analysis of the nuances of literal translation practices, Mizuno follows the different stages in the development of this strategy, exploring case studies such as Futabatei Shimei, Ikuta Chōkō, the New Sensationalists Movement, Nogami Toyoichirō and Iwano Hōmei. Each of these examples not only put forward a particular view on how to translate, but also a unique definition of "literal translation." Undoubtedly, consciously and sometimes unconsciously, these competing translation strategies contributed to the creation of new forms of expression and new traditions in Japanese literature.

With Watanabe Tomie's article, we move to post-war Japan and the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal held from 1946 to 1948. The author analyses the interpretation performed during Tojo's cross-examination, which proves to be fertile ground for exploring the beginnings of interpretation in Japan. Indeed, it was during this trial that the IBM system and the interpreter's booth

were first used, while the process of interpretation itself differed greatly from what we now call simultaneous interpretation, since there were few if any professionally trained Japanese interpreters at the time, and most of them had to work in both directions. Beside the interpreters, monitors from the Allied Powers were also present in order to insure quality. Watanabe details each player's tasks, the way the room and the work were organized, the difficulties encountered and the proposed solutions, such as language arbitration. Yet, even with numerous interventions and corrections by the monitors and the interpreters, many interpretation errors were made, leading some participants to believe that these errors affected the judgments that were rendered. However, as Watanabe points out, there was an evolution in the performance of interpreters and monitors as the trial progressed (and it did last for nearly two years), both parties gained experience, and the collaboration between them greatly improved. Moreover, this trial, being a laboratory for developing interpretation methodology, is an example of the visibility of the interpreters and of the monitors who, instead of being hidden from sight, occupied a prominent position among the participants. Viewing the interpretation and monitoring practices at the Tokyo Tribunal as an integrated service, Watanabe concludes that the level being offered was satisfactory in quality.

Fukuchi Meldrum Yukari brings us back to an examination of literary translation, but moves from the Meiji period, explored by Mizuno, to contemporary Japan. Here, the author tackles the issue of "translationese," or the language of translation as a linguistic system. Even though it feels "unnatural" to Japanese readers, it has no negative connotations and is thus viewed as "normal," and is expected by the public. After sketching a brief portrait of the development of translationese in Japan, Fukuchi Meldrum concentrates on what she calls "contemporary Japanese translationese." First, some concrete examples of the phenomenon are given, such as the use of grammatical subjects or the introduction of punctuation, foreign elements that came into the language through translationese. These elements are now used by everybody, not only in translations, but also in any text written originally in Japanese. Then the author analyses the socio-cultural background of translations in Japan and justly points out

that Japanese translators are highly esteemed and respected in their society. Moreover, a high production volume of translated literature in Japan contributes to the popularity of the profession. Finally, Fukuchi Meldrum notes that only one study exists so far that tries to examine attitudes towards translationese in Japan, a situation that she would like to change.

Thus, Fukuchi Meldrum proposes research prolegomena into an untapped area of Translation Studies, namely the descriptive study of contemporary translationese in Japan, using the corpora of translated and non-translated texts while paying special attention to the literary genre. The author demonstrates this idea with a study in its initial, descriptive stage, based on an analysis of the Japanese translation of *The Bridges of Madison County* which she compares to a novel by Watanabe Jun'ichi. Clear parameters are used to determine whether the characteristics of translationese are indeed found in this translated text. The results all point to a rather convincing illustration of the hypothesis: more third person pronouns and loanwords are found in a translation than in non-translated works. Fukuchi Meldrum suggests in her conclusion that further examination is required in order to make more definite statements, although the hypothesis seems to hold at this early stage of analysis. The results of this pilot study prove to be encouraging, and after determining the features of translationese, it would be illuminating to move to the analysis of the reception of contemporary translationese in Japan.

With Tamaki Yuko we remain in the world of contemporary translation, but explore the role of the literary agent in the publishing business in Japan. First, a brief overview of book production is given: we learn, for example, that most translations are initiated by the publishers, not the translators, and that this is similar to situations found abroad. Then, using the polysystem theory, the author demonstrates that translated literature occupies a peripheral position in contemporary Japan's publishing world governed by "target language norms." In this context the literary agent serves as liaison between the translator and the publisher.

To illustrate this situation, Tamaki proposes a case study of the TranNet literary agency that has sophisticated tools for selecting translators and for maintaining a network of interested members. While still in its infancy, this agency is gaining in popularity, and helps to produce a large number of translations every year. However, the author notes that it is the publisher who initiates a translation project and who expects the agency to carry out the translation according to the publisher's wishes. Thus, Tamaki notices eight paratextual characteristics in the system when calling for translators, which shed some light on the publishing strategies at play. The dominance of English, the absence of a "Literature" category, the choice of the translated title being governed by the sales department (not the editors), among other elements, indicate that the main strategy is a maximization of potential financial gain. Moreover, contrary to what Fukuchi Meldrum advances about translationese, Tamaki discovers, through an interview with the TransNet CEO, that the agency's ideal is a target-language oriented fluent translation. Moreover, the hierarchical order among the players in this field makes the voice and the role of translators even less prominent.

From the publishing world driven by commercial prestige, where translators do not seem to have a solid position, we move to a space which is as competitive, but seems to give more voice to the translators: in her article, O'Hagan Minako analyses the practice of Japanese video games localization. In this industry, localization strategy is driven by the pleasure principle, and so the translators and the localization specialists must be able to understand and experience the entertainment value of the games they are working on for themselves. As the author explains, this particular situation gives the translator more freedom, and so the term "transcreation" is suggested to describe localization activity. This is not to say that there are no limitations. The strategies are in constant flux between domestication and foreignization, depending on the type of video game and the degree of "Japaneseness" that it is required to maintain.

In order to get a better understanding of localization practices, O'Hagan looks at the *Final Fantasy* series produced by Square Enix (SE). Again, if we recall how translators were treated

by the literary agencies and the publishing houses analysed in Tamaki's article, we cannot help but immediately notice several striking differences. For example, as O'Hagan mentions, SE has full-time localization specialists who are treated in a professional manner and are recognized as valuable assets, because they bring success to the company and to its products in unique ways, such as a particular game series being expanded for the localized English version. This example created a situation of reverse-localization, when the English component became localized back into Japanese. As O'Hagan concludes, the foreignness was appreciated by the Japanese players, and localization became a way to continuously improve the series rather than to provide a simple one-way delivery of the original product.

We conclude with an article by Sakai Naoki, who challenges the figures of geographic space or distance often used in the representation of translation. Or rather, he presents translation as taking part in a "dislocation of communication." Adopting a historiographic approach, the author questions the modern communications model and the concepts and definitions it provides. According to Sakai, the Jakobsonian model might seem "good on paper" if one assumes that the translator simply finds himself between two homogeneous linguistic communities, between two monolithic blocs of "Self" and "Other," and that they transfer an invariant message from one side to the other. If one adopts this model, one falls into the binary mode of "monolingual address" of the "regime of translation" governed by an institutionalized view of things. To understand the act of translation outside of this imposed model, Sakai proposes an analysis of the position of address of the translator, which reveals this position to be one of ambiguity. The translator is not the addressee ("you"), nor the addresser ("I"), and the act of translation itself constantly dislocates "the paradigmatic relations of personal positions." Thus, instead of adhering to the concept of "monolingual address," Sakai introduces the concept of "heterolingual address" that frees the translator from the regime of translation.

Besides the representation of the translator, the regime of translation also creates a representation of translation, which

Sakai calls "the schema of co-figuration." As the author explains, this co-figurative binary model historically allowed for the construction of ethno-linguistic unity, which resulted in the formation of the "geo-body," a political concept on which the "nation" can be built. In other words, it is modernity itself that is being developed according to this schema. Then, as Sakai further elaborates, it is not surprising to see the emergence and the use of a "the West and the Rest" co-figuration, which brings great advantages to some and great disadvantages to others, since the very notion of what is "modern" is based on an Eurocentric Western structure. In his conclusion Sakai clearly states that "how we represent translation prescribes not only how we collectively imagine national communities and ethnic identities but also how we relate individually to national sovereignty."

So, after reading the seven articles chosen for the issue on translation in Japan, let us go back to the question raised by Henri Meschonnic who viewed Japan as a country of continuity with its fundamental texts, a country of solid tradition and identity. Is there indeed continuity and evolution here (in the Latin sense)? Can we view modern Japan outside of the "West"? What role has translation played in constructing "Japan"? These are all complex questions, and we hope that this *TTR* issue stimulates further discussion among Translation Studies scholars around the world.

Finally, on behalf of the Canadian Association for Translation Studies, I take this opportunity to salute the Japan Association for Interpreting and Translation Studies. Created in 2008, it aims to foster scientific and interdisciplinary studies related to the theory and practice of interpreting and translation. This is great news for researchers interested in Japan and for all members of the international Translation Studies community.

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY