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# Comptes rendus

■ VINAY, Jean-Paul and Jean DARBELNET (1995) : *Comparative Stylistics of French and English, a Methodology for Translation*, translated and edited by Juan C. Sager and M.-J. Hamel, Benjamins Translation Library, vol. 11, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, XX + 358 p.

This work is a translation of Vinay, J.-P. & J. Darbelnet. *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*. (Paris: Didier et Montréal: Beauchemin, 1958). It is unusual for a translation to appear 37 years after the original. When the authors started teaching in Montreal in the 1940s, they found most of the translation being done by bilingual typists, for it was generally assumed that anyone who knew both languages was by definition a translator. They changed all that, pointing out that the ability to translate was an exact discipline that could be analysed, taught, and learned. By defining it as comparative stylistics, they identified it as a branch of linguistics, broadening its scope beyond the simple catalogue of lexical equivalents their predecessors had imagined it to be.

Their approach is founded on the concept of the "sign" taken from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (p. 12*). According to Saussure, the "sign" is a dual reality, composed of a concept (*le signifié*) and the acoustic or visual image (*le signifiant*) that calls it to mind (p. 13). For example, they have mailboxes in both the United States and Canada (same signifier), but in the U.S., they are blue and have round tops, while in Canada, they have sloping tops and are bright red (different signifieds). They are red in the U.K., too, but if you ask someone where to mail a letter, they will refer you to the nearest "pillar box" (different signifier). The plot thickens when you translate, because the translator has to deal with two signs at a time. How to do it is what this book is all about.

The reader will find the basic rules in the section on methodology (pp. 30-42); presenting seven techniques of direct and oblique translation: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation. These are discussed and exemplified in the subsequent chapters, devoted to the lexicon (pp. 51-91), structures (pp. 92-163) and the message (pp. 164-291). In the last chapter, the authors state: "We have therefore assumed [...] that the two languages can be usefully contrasted via the semantic bridge provided by translation (p. 277).

This poses a fundamental question: "Is this indeed the translation of a manual concerning translation?" The answer would have to be "more or less," and very likely rather more than less. For one thing, in the Editors' Note (pp. vii-viii), J.C. Sager and M.-J. Hamel describe the manner in which they have not only translated, but revised and expanded the content and presentation of the material. The book is therefore not only a translation, but a new, expanded edition of the work.

In the second place, the English translation, like the French original, contains a wealth of information about both languages, for example, why the *imparfait* in French is an aspect, rather than a tense (p. 133), or what to do about deictics, *i.e.*, anaphoric (referring to the past) and cataphoric (looking ahead) expressions in both languages (pp. 260-262). It does contain the fundamental principles of the Vinay-Darbelnet approach, and these would be accessible to any educated person reading the French original or the English translation. But the voluminous and detailed material filling the rest of either version would be accessible only to a reader who was completely fluent in both languages and had studied them both in depth. Such a reader would care little whether the book was in French or in English.

Then what clientele is the translation aimed at? Probably a clientele similar to the one attracted to the courses given by Vinay in Montreal and Darbelnet in Quebec City. Some were translators or translation trainees, but many were students of language who regarded the courses as the most advanced level of instruction available in the two languages. Frequently, they were aiming at a teaching career at the college or university level.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the translation? Its strengths are the quality of the translation, the cross-references, the changes in format, and the section on further reading at the end of each chapter. The alphanumeric identification of chapters and sections has been replaced by a decimal system, and the sections are cross-referenced, using this system. Examples are arranged throughout in two columns, instead of run-on text. The "Further reading" section at the end of each chapter contains a critical bibliography of recent publications. They would be extremely helpful to the reader who wished to delve further into the subject. The translation is of a uniformly high quality, and some of it is rather ingenious: "piecemeal planning" (p. 229) for *phrases segmentées*, is an example.

The weaknesses are a regrettable number of errors and the fact that the index is limited to theoretical entries. The errors are mostly misprints that could be corrected in a reprinting: "pretented" for "pretended" (p. 33), or "Montherland" for "Montherlant" (p. 206). Several other things might bear straightening out. For example, it is necessary to refer to the French original to find out what went wrong on page 110 that produced the curious expression *chaussé bleu.* (The two words got transposed.) And on page 149, the translators were led down the garden path by the original in condemning the progressive form "I am seeing." It is, of course, a perfectly acceptable form in daily use in such sentences as: "For the first time, I'm seeing him for what he really is," or "Am I seeing things, or is that John Doe coming down the street?"

The biggest improvement however would be to expand the index to include the examples, the way Maurice Grevisse did in *Le Bon Usage* , where examples appear in italics and theoretical topics in roman. To consult this highly-reputed work, you don't have to approach it from the theoretical standpoint. All you have to do is to think of a word contained in an expression you need help with and look it up in the index. Making the *Comparative Stylistics of French and English* accessible via the examples would go a long way toward making it as popular a reference work in the field of stylistics as *le*

*Grevisse* is in the field of grammar. In today's marketplace, a book needs all the readers it can get. The *Comparative Stylistics of French and English* deserves them.

* Page references are to the 1995 translation.

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