TTR
Traduction, terminologie, re?daction

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La traduction, la terminologie et la rédaction en chronique (8)

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Kitty M. VAN LEUVEN-ZWART and Ton NAAIJ-KENS. *Translation Studies: The State of the Art.* **Proceedings of the First James S Holmes Symposium on Translation Studies. Amsterdam - Atlanta, Rodopi, "Approaches to Translation Studies" 9, 1991, 208 pp.**

This is a collection of papers delivered at a December 1990 symposium marking the 25th anniversary of the Department of Translation Studies at the University of Amsterdam. (The editors are to be congratulated on getting the material into print just six months after the event, though one unfortunate result is the lack of an index.) Each contribution takes as its point of departure the papers by the late James Holmes published under the title *Translated!* (Rodopi, 1988). The book will serve as an introduction to Holmes and an update on his program for Translation Studies (TS).

An interesting paper by Hans HÖNIG uses recent empirical studies of the mental process of translation to develop Holmes' notion (1988, p. 83) that translators create mental maps of the source text and the projected translation. Raymond van den BROECK looks at Holmes' development of Jiří Levý's use of game theory to describe the activity of the translator. Peter VERSTEGEN, in an avowedly normative paper, says that some of the options Holmes sets out for translation (1988, p. 49) are not or should not be used, but he seems to miss Holmes' theory-mindedness: Holmes was trying to show all the possible ways of translating on a graph (the X-axis representing exoticizing vs naturalizing translation, the Y-axis historicizing

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vs modernizing), with one graph for each of three aspects of a text — linguistic, literary and socio-cultural. Theory would then try to explain why some options are used at particular times and places.

José LAMBERT and Gideon TOURY both discuss the relationships among Holmes' three divisions of TS — theoretical, descriptive and applied studies. Lambert points out that theory has tended to be a justification for applied TS (i.e. for this or that approach to translation pedagogy or criticism) rather than an explanation of the findings of descriptive TS. Toury suggests that 'laws of translation' confirmed by observation can be applied in translation pedagogy: students can be taught to consciously counter certain observable tendencies toward information loss. Theo HERMANS discusses the role of translational norms as a form of social behaviour, that is, as a part of descriptive rather than applied TS.

The problem of defining TS takes up a large part of the book and will be the focus of this review, with emphasis on theoretical TS. In Mary SNELL-HORNBY's discussion of Holmes' trail-blazing 1972 paper "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies," she states that:

> The need to delimit the field is now less acute than it was twenty years ago; the tendency is rather to look for points of contact. In this environment translation, which by nature involves many disciplines, can flourish, and so broad is our field that Gideon Toury's term *inter-discipline* seems to me the most apt one to describe it. (p. 19)

This somewhat complacent outlook is characteristic of the metatheoretical reflections in the book, my main criticism of which concerns not what it does but what it fails to do. Instead of *debating* the limits of the field, it simply endorses a broad pluralism. (Perhaps there was oral debate at the Symposium, but it is not reflected in this publication — a common failing of the "proceedings" genre.)

If the study of translation was once defined too narrowly, as a branch of applied linguistics, it is now in danger of hyperexpansion, of becoming a mere meeting-place for anyone interested in translation for any reason. Certainly one wants to draw concepts *from* many disciplines (even theoretical physics: cf. Barbara Folkart, "Translation and the Arrow of Time" in *TTR*, II:1). But that leaves the question of what they are applied *to*. Should TS not follow Saussure's approach to language, and distinguish

translating as a focus of interest from translating as an illustration of some other problem or some more general type of activity?

Much writing on translation is really addressed to broad questions about communication or knowledge or culture, given their necessary mediation by language. This is true of Quine on the "indeterminacy of translation" — discussed here in a paper by Anneke van LUXEMBURG-ALBERS about Holmes' reflections on the translatability of one line of a Dutch poem — and it is true of Jacques Derrida's numerous reflections on translation. It is one thing to apply specific deconstructionist concepts, as Holmes suggested (1988, pp. 106-107); it is something else to turn translation theory into a general meditation on *différence*, metaphor and philosophy.

Thus Matthijs BAKKER & Ton NAAIJKENS suggest in their paper that Holmes' distinction between secondary and original writing cannot be sustained. Gesturing to the deconstructionists, they say that "the world is always already translated, that is, transformed into language" (p. 196), and they cite Proust in support: "le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur." (In this passage of *Le Temps retrouvé*, the "translation" in question is that of personal memories into writing: the narrator says of "the only true book" that "it is not the task of a great writer to invent it in the ordinary sense, for it already exists in each of us, but to translate it.")

What is annoying here is that the authors simply mention all this in passing. Surely what amounts to a suggestion that translation theory become a general theory of writing requires detailed justification.

The word "translation" certainly lends itself to extension: one can speak of translating metaphor or jargon into abstract or plain language; translating the content of dreams into language, or a poem into music; or translating one's thoughts into language. In 1978, Igor Mel'čuk proclaimed in *Meta* (XXIII:4, p. 271) that linguistics *is* the study of translation, since language is a device for "translating" meaning into text. One wonders whether such metaphorical extensions of the word really achieve any insight.

Even a limitation to texts-based-on-other-texts leaves a very broad field indeed for TS. What you are now reading could be described as my "translation" of the book under review (in its turn a "translation" of

Holmes' papers). I am responding to the book by quoting, summarizing and commenting on it to you, just as a translator reports to target-language readers what the source-text author wrote.

Bakker & Naaijkens' starting point is Holmes' "fan" of meta-literary forms — ranging from a critical essay on a poem to a verse translation of the poem to a poem inspired by the poem (1988, p. 24). They suggest (p. 196) that Holmes viewed these forms as a cline, one blending into another, but a close reading of Holmes does not really support this: he uses inverted commas when describing a critical essay as "translating" a poem (1988, p. 24), and in his "Name and Nature" paper he explicitly restricts the field to interlingual translation (1988, p. 80).

Even where a cline does exist between two phenomena X and Y, they are still distinguishable. Observations at the border between X and Y, or within Y, may be revealing about X but that does not mean a joint theory of X and Y is desirable. In a given society, the word "translation" or its equivalent may be applied or extendable to other metatexts, but it does not follow that a general theory of re-writing is wanted. Sciences have to constitute their object, not take it ready-made from passing linguistic usage. Was there any debate on such matters at the Symposium?

Consider how some feminist theorists have been moving beyond topics such as loss of references to women's experience when texts are translated, or the role translators might play in enriching the target language to reflect women's presence. In *The Body Bilingual: Translation as Re-Writing in the Feminine* (Toronto, Women's Press, 1991), Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood speaks of "two registers of translation: from SL to TL and from masculine to feminine." As a gay man, Holmes would doubtless have been interested in the general problem of making texts reflect the experience of people other than heterosexual men. But would he have thought it a task for translation theory?

Whatever parallels might exist between translation and other kinds of re-writing (e.g. the derived text necessarily differs from the source text in meaning), translation could well prove to be distinct psycholinguistically, and it is certainly a distinct socio-political activity, since translation is the linguistic component of international relations. One might propose a theory of those aspects of translations and other metatexts which they have in common, though if the aim is to carve out a niche for TS, there will be competition here from other disciplines: in *Translation and Relevance*

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(Blackwell, 1991), Ernst Gutt claims there is no need for a separate translation theory, since translation can already be accounted for as an "interpretive use" of language within Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory of pragmatics, a subfield of linguistics.

What theory needs is not hyperextension but — as Gideon TOURY says (p. 186) — a gradual transition from what Holmes called *partial* theories of (interlingual) translation to a *general* theory. Such a theory might well situate translation with respect to other kinds of re-writing, but more importantly it would unify or at least articulate the great range of geolinguistic situations in which translation is and has been done, and the many media of translation: oral, written, human, machine, signing, dubbing. While progress has been made toward a unified picture of the translation of different text-types, Holmes' diagnosis of the state of affairs in 1972 still holds true:

> Most of the theories that have been produced to date are... both too inclusive (covering also non-translatory acts...) and too exclusive (shutting out some translatory acts...). (1988, p. 73)

Snell-Hornby notes (p. 21) that TS conferences typically draw scholars from just a few countries. Participants are familiar with only a restricted range of the world's translating situations, media and text-types. This Symposium, reflecting Holmes' interest in poetry though not his definition of TS, seems to have been heavily focussed on European literary texts — with the usual attendant prejudices. Did anyone challenge Armin Paul FRANK's assertion (pp. 118-119) that literary texts have a special ontological status as "primary texts" because the meaning of other genres ("instruction manuals, museum catalogues... court proceedings") can be clarified by reference to some pre-existing reality? One wonders whether Frank has ever translated a court proceeding.

Also, since ten of the sixteen papers are by Dutch and Belgian scholars (the only other countries represented being Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Israel), one is tempted to paraphrase the book's title: "the state of TS as understood in the Low Countries." It might have been useful to invite Antoine Berman, who was still alive at the time, to compare Holmes' views to his own eleven-point program of 1986 for *la traductologie* (cf "La traduction et ses discours," reprinted in *Meta* XXXIV:4, 1989).

The barriers to advances in theoretical TS will not be removed by journals of international scope (which we already have) or by more translations of theoretical works (though certainly there is a dearth of universal reference points — Nida being the rule-proving exception). The real barriers are much more daunting: just as theoretical linguistics could not advance until basic training in the discipline provided a knowledge of languages around the world, so translation theory will be hampered as long as *each scholar's* range of basic knowledge is narrow. Valuable applied and descriptive studies such as many of those collected here will be possible, but theory will lag.

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Roger ELLIS, ed. *The Medieval Translator. The Theory and Practice of Translation in The Middle Ages.* Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1989, 202 p.
Roger ELLIS, ed. *The Medieval Translator, volume II.* London, Centre for Medieval Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1991, 276 p.

These two volumes contain papers presented in 1987 at the first Cardiff Conference on the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages. In the first, some eleven papers deal with topics ranging from the general — a consideration of the ways in which oft-quoted classical formulas proscribing literal translation were interpreted by medieval translators, and a reflection on the genre of translation in Middle English and its relation to original writing — to the particular: translation of a specific genre of writing (Lives of Christ), analyses of individual translations (Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*, Hue's *Ipomedon*, Richard Rolle's *Melos Amoris*, and a version of *Sir Ferumbras*) and of the practices of individual translators (Chaucer, Dame Eleanor Hull, Malory). A variety of topics then, but a common area — that of Middle English. In the second volume there is greater diversity, with studies of Toledo school in Spain, of French texts and their Welsh translators, and of translations done in Scandinavia at the Monastery of Vadstena, but studies also of translations of particular works or groups of works — the correspondance of Abélard and Héloïse, the *Li*