

APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION

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Foreword

In this Volume *Approaches to Translation* Professor Peter Newmark of Polytechnic of Central London has made an important contribution to a more satisfactory understanding of the real nature of translation. Wide acquaintance with the literature on translation theory, many years of experience in teaching translation techniques, and obvious expertise as a translator have all contributed to this well-illustrated and highly useful contribution to a better comprehension of the many phases of the translator's task.

Professor Newmark's major contribution is in a detailed treatment of semantic vs. communicative translating in which semantic translation focuses primarily upon the semantic content of the source text and communicative translation focuses essentially upon the comprehension and response of receptors. This distinction becomes especially relevant for the wide diversity of text types which Professor Newmark considers.

This approach to translation flatly rejects the proposition that translation is a science, but it does insist on treating the basic propositions of translation in terms of a theory of communication, one which is not restricted to a single literary genre or text type but which has applicability to a wide range of discourse and related problems. Accordingly, this volume deals extensively with the problems of figurative language and proposes a number of valuable suggestions as to how these can and should be handled.

Professor Newmark's teaching experience leads him to deal with a number of matters which most books on translation largely overlook—e.g. the rendering of proper names and titles and the translation of metalinguistic texts, which, with the exception of lyric poetry, are perhaps the most difficult types of texts to render without considerable readjustments in content and form.

The second part of this volume treats not only a wide range of practical issues, including punctuation, translation techniques, and technical translating, but also some elements of central importance to any student of translation—e.g. the significance of linguistics for translation and the relevance of translation theories to the translator's task.

Probably some of the most insightful comments in this volume are those which suggest a basis for a critique of translation methodology—something which one could well expect of someone who has had such a long and rich experience in teaching prospective translators and evaluating their efforts.

EUGENE A. NIDA

April

Preface

I first wrote on translation in 1957 for the long-defunct *Journal of Education*—an article which is duly recorded in the Nida (1964) and Jumpelt (1961) bibliographies. In 1967 I started writing again, not long after Anthony Crane and I had launched the first full-time postgraduate course in technical and specialized translation at what was then the Holborn College of Law, Languages and Commerce. In fact, I am something of a compulsive writer, but I am first a teacher, and though I owe much to Nida and the Leipzig School (or rather, as I saw them when I first became interested in translation theory, the *Fremdsprachen* writers), the main source of stimulation for my papers, and more particularly my propositions, is my classes.

Linguistics, in the modern sense of the word, did not exist in Great Britain 25 years ago except perhaps at J. R. Firth's SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) of the University of London. In its wake, translation theory is slowly developing from a series of rather general reflections and essays on the merits of faithful and free translation—interspersed with clichified epigrams identifying translation with women, carpets, traitors, coats, mirrors, Turkish tapestry (the reverse side), copper coins, false portraits, clear or coloured glass, musical transcriptions, wives, heroism and folly—to represent an identifiable and somewhat peculiar discipline. It is an academic pursuit that is dependent upon and apparently subordinate to a practical exercise. In a sense it is at third remove. Those who can, write; those who cannot, translate; those who cannot translate, write about translation. However, Goethe and a host of respectable writers who wrote well, translated well and wrote well about translation are an obvious disproof of this adapted Shavianism.

The fascination of translation theory lies in the large scope of its pertinence, its basic appeal (the concern with words) and its disparate levels, from the meaning within a context, of, say, a full stop to the meaning within another context of, say, the word 'God'. Translation theory's present standing is not yet secure. To begin with, 'everyone' has views about translation, many have written about it, few have written books about it. It is taught at various universities in the Federal Republic, the GDR and in other Eastern European countries; at the universities of Paris, Amsterdam, Montreal, Ottawa and Tel-Aviv. 'Verrons-nous un jour figurer aux programmes des universités un cours de "Sciences de la Traduction" qui placera à leur juste rang le traducteur et l'interprète dans la communauté culturelle?' M. E. Williams, Président of the École de Traduction et d'Interprétation of Geneva University, wrote wistfully in *Parallèles*, 1978. As far as I know, such courses are unknown in most anglophone countries. In the United Kingdom there have been undergraduate courses for the last 6 years at the Polytechnic of Central London; the University of Dundee and Portsmouth Polytechnic run a course in conjunction with their German options, and

Bristol Polytechnic is about to start a course. There is still no chair in translation theory.

I have always intended to write a textbook of translation theory and practice when I give up full-time teaching. I should then be in a better position to understand the bounds and to grasp the scope of my subject. As it is, I still see many virtually neglected areas and topics. In the meantime, I am happy to follow Vaughan James's invitation to publish some of my papers.

I have selected two introductory papers; three on communicative and semantic translation, which is my main contribution to general theory: one on texts related to language functions, to which I shall later add papers relating to the expressive and informative language functions; one on the translation of encyclopaedic and cultural terms—which is perhaps the most practical aspect of translation theory—and two on synonymy and metaphor: and, finally, from three papers I am reproducing nearly 150 so-called propositions on translation (these a not too distant echo of Nietzsche's paragraphs, I hope) which range from large topics such as the status of translation as an academic exercise and its relation to language-teaching and etymology to indication of the sense-values of the various punctuation marks.

I am aware of many gaps: such topics as lexical and grammatical ambiguity, the translation of poetry, technical translation (I have published papers on medical translation in the *Incorporated Linguist*, vol. 14, nos. 2 and 3, 1976, and in the *British Medical Journal*, Dec. 1979), synonymy (discussed in 'Some problems of translation theory and methodology', *Fremdsprachen*, 1978-9), the translation of plays, the history of translation, translation's influence on culture are hardly touched on. Other subjects such as the unit of translation, translation equivalence, translation invariance, detailed schemes for assessing translation, I regard as dead ducks—either too theoretical or too arbitrary.

With many limitations, these papers attempt to discuss certain significant aspects of translation and to give some indication of its importance in transmitting culture, in revitalizing language, in interpreting texts, in diffusing knowledge, in suggesting the relationship between thought and language and in contributing towards understanding between nations. That is a mouthful, so I would add that some of the unending fascination of the pursuit of words and things and utterances rubs off onto the pursuit of translation rules and recipes.

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- 'A note on translation and translators', *Incorporated Linguist*, April 1969, October 1969.
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- 'Teaching Italian translation', *Incorporated Linguist*, April 1971.
- 'The case for literature', *Universities Quarterly*, June 1972.
- 'Twenty-four restricted rules of translation', *Incorporated Linguist*, January 1973
- 'An approach to translation', *Babel* xix (1) 3-19, January 1973.
- 'Further propositions on translation parts I and II', *Incorporated Linguist* 13 (2 and 3) 34-43 and 62-73, 1974.
- 'The case for précis', *The use of English* 25 (3) 226-8, Spring 1974.
- 'Book review (*The new Muret-Sanders' Encyclopaedic Dictionary*)', *Incorporated Linguist*, April 1975 and Winter 1976.
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- 'European languages: some perspectives', *Curriculum Development*, (10) 8-33, University of Sussex, Winter 1975.
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- 'Componential analysis and translation theory', *Papers in Traductology*, University of Ottawa, 1978.
- 'Thought, language and translation', *Babel* (4) 1978.
- Article on 'Applied linguistics' in *Areté Encyclopaedia*, 1979.
- 'Sixty further propositions on translation', *Incorporated Linguist*, March 1979.
- 'The translation of metaphor', *Babel* (2) 1980.

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