

LET'S TALK TRANSLATION ECONOMICALLY A DEMONSTRATION OF RE-ARTICULATING TRANSLATION THROUGH ECONOMICS TERMS¹

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Abstract: As a sequel to my paper *The Second Best Thing* (2005) on use of game theory in simultaneous interpreting, this paper reviews application of economics concepts and terms, which can enable and facilitate game theory in discussions and instructions of translation. I will begin with a list of the concepts and terms with their general definitions provided, including opportunity cost, cost, cost management, risk, attitude to risk and game theory. Next, I will reconstruct a real-life simultaneous interpreting assignment, which is meant to serve as an experimental context for the application of the said concepts and terms. I will then proceed to demonstrate how the concepts and terms mentioned can be applied to the discussion and operation of the assignment. There will be a passing listing of other concepts and terms, including research, profiling, envisaging, investment, return, options, probability, credit and accountability, which I reckon are also important for articulating and teaching translation. The paper will also state the purposes of importing these economics concepts and terms, which were to establish an alternative, rationalized discourse of translation not constrained by conventional terms such as equivalence, accuracy and adequacy.

Key words: translation and economics, game theory and game planning, cost and opportunity cost, risk and risk management

INTRODUCTION

I have been practicing translation/interpreting since 1983 and teaching in the discipline since 1991. But it was only recently that I finally came of age with recognition of the limitation of the discourse of accuracy, which had prevailed in translation and translation studies. Following the much belated recognition, I

questioned accurate, objective, adequate and comprehensive translation (Zhong 1998) and attempted to transcend the discourse of accuracy in academic and pedagogical pursuits (Zhong 2002), but was not yet able to establish an alternative discourse. That is, not until even more recently, during a simultaneous interpreting (SI) assignment for an APAC Ministers' Forum and Senior Officers' Meeting held in Bali in October 2003, when I experimented with game theory. The actual designing of a game plan for that occasion was documented in a paper entitled *The Second Best Thing: Game Planning for A Mission Impossible or Just for Enjoying the Process of the Work* (Zhong 2005).

But the process of writing up the game plan and discussing of the new knowledge in subsequent lectures was fraught with difficulty as I struggled with the descriptive language that was available in the translation discourse. A process of game planning for an interpreting assignment would involve most of the following aspects: undertaking research, constructing options, determining priorities, making assumptions, identifying problems, calculating risks/costs in relation to output, making decision, setting objectives, designing strategies/solutions, evaluating performance and readjusting priorities/objectives/strategies. However, the conventional descriptive language and terms available for use in translation studies offered little imaginary and discursive space for discussing these and many other aspects of game planning. Hence, I began exploring alternative language, especially terms that could facilitate an entirely new and different approach to translation practice and teaching.

In the search for an alternative language for translation, I noticed that the concept of game theory was originally an economics one developed by John Nash and his colleagues, who were awarded an economics Nobel Prize for it in 1994.² This and the fact that game theory was later widely applied to many other disciplines, such as business studies and international relations, actually inspired me to think that economics might be a resourceful discursive bank where I could borrow concepts and terms for adaptation and use in translation narratives. I was especially heartened as I honestly conceded that colleagues in economics studies were noted for their aspiration to rationalize their pursuit, arguably much more so than us working as translation practitioners and academics. I thought that, by looking at how economists tackled their discipline, I could rethink how translation practitioners and academics could tackle our discipline in an alternative approach.

For example, two major questions of economics are: How are choices made in human society? How do the choices made determine how the resources of society are used? To quote Stiglitz, "choices matter because resources are scarce" (1993:10). In translation, we should ask the same questions. What choices do we make and how do we make choices in translation? How do the choices made influence use of the resources available to translators? The two

questions are of paramount importance because, and I repeat what Stiglitz said, choices matter because resources are scarce.

ECONOMICS TERMS

Indeed I felt as if a whole new world opened up in my vision once I started thinking and talking translation in the economics language. Translation/interpreting became a selective redistribution of available but limited resources, trade-offs, give and take, gain and loss, decision making, a process of operation, management, purposeful treatment for the sake of maximizing something and minimizing something else. As a matter of fact, when I next proceed to discussing the concepts and terms sourced from economics and their uses, my writing would appear as if it had all the fluid and changeable ingredients of a business plan but very little certainty typical of the convention- and rule-dominated translation that we are used to seeing. Let me concede this for the time being but also invite attention to a list of concepts and terms that I have borrowed from economics.

While economics provided me with an entirely new descriptive language for translation/interpreting, I have found the following concepts and terms to be especially useful and insightful: cost, opportunity cost, cost minimization, risk, attitude to risk, game theory. There are other useful concepts and terms, including credit, investment, return, resource, option, management, probability, accountability, but a thorough discussion of these would far exceed the capacity of this article and its author. Thorough and specialized discussions of economics theories are also beyond the scope of this article. So I am humbly satisfied just to begin with the definitions of the selected concepts and terms and then discuss them in a reconstructed SI task. In many instances of defining the terms, I will quote from Stiglitz's *Principles of Microeconomics* and, therefore, I will print the page numbers in brackets after each quotation.

Opportunity Cost

Opportunity cost is defined on the basis of scarce resources and the necessity for trade-offs. According to Stiglitz, "to apply a resource to one use means that it cannot be put to any other use. Thus, we should consider the next-best, alternative use of any resource when we think about putting it to use. The next-best use is the formal measurement of opportunity cost" (p. 44).

Cost

Cost is “the expense of making the object” (p. 98) and exists in relation to profit and revenue. It is defined as the distraction of the revenue before profit is generated. Mathematically, the relation is expressed by the equation: $\text{profits} = \text{revenue} - \text{cost}$. I like this equation because it is a simple statement that profit is maximized when cost is minimized.

Cost Management and the Principle of Substitution

I referred to the necessity of cost management with regard to cost and will mention a common strategy for cost minimization, the principle of substitution. When the price of one input (say, raw materials) increases relative to that of other factors of production, the change in price relations will cause the producer to substitute cheaper inputs (e.g., labor) for the more costly factor.

Risks

Risk is often defined in economics by its unavoidable association with most assets and, therefore, a prime consideration for any investor is the riskiness of any investment alternative. A full appreciation of how risks work in economics is beyond the scope of this article. It suffices to say that some assets are riskier than others and, therefore, “they may have a greater chance of very low returns and a greater chance of very high returns” (p. 261).

Attitudes to Risk

No one can completely avoid taking risks, yet there are different attitudes to risk. Most people are risk averse, i.e., if they can get the same average return with less risk, they will generally choose to do so. Others are risk loving, i.e., in certain situations they enjoy taking risks. Still others are risk neutral, i.e., they care only about the expected return and are indifferent between two assets that pose different amounts of risks, provided they generate the same expected return. Furthermore, “the fact that most people are risk averse means that risky assets must offer a higher average return to induce investors to buy them” (p. 261).

Game Theory

Game theory is a branch of mathematics used by economists in recent years to study collusion among oligopolists. It “begins with the assumption that each player in the game is rational and knows that his rival is rational. Each is trying to maximize his own payoff. The theory then tries to predict what each player will do. The answer depends on the rules of the game and the payoffs” (p. 427), where payoffs refer to the results for each player.

In order to exemplify how they can be used to discuss translation practice, I will use the economics terms to recount a real life simultaneous interpreting task that I personally completed.

RECONSTRUCTING 4TH APAC MINISTERS' FORUM IN ECONOMICS LANGUAGE

In order to exemplify the use of the economics language, I have reconstructed an actual simultaneous interpretation task involving a so-called China country paper delivered by a senior Chinese officer at the 4th Ministers' Forum on Infrastructure Development in the Asia Pacific Region held in October 2003, Bali, Indonesia. The subject matter of the forum was financing for infrastructure, which was of great currency and concern in recent years in different corners of the world.

Ministers and senior officers, representing Asia Pacific countries including Australia, Chile, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, P. R. China, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and the USA attended the forum. The forum started with a country infrastructure paper of 10 minutes by a senior officer from each of the participatory country and concluded with a communiqué to be finalized and signed by the ministers. It was for the especially difficult China country paper that I deliberately designed a SI game plan.

I obtained an English script of the China country paper the night before its delivery and found it to be what I called a SI mission impossible. It was very long, with a total of 4,600 words, equivalent to about 13,800 syllables, stuffed with numerous technical terms (e.g., TEU, DWT, KWH, BOT, TOT and World Development Report) and over 250 sets of figures (e.g., Chinese Yuan and US dollars in their trillions or billions). I reprint a typical paragraph from the paper but readers can look up my earlier publication *The Second Best Thing* for a detailed description of the paper.

China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2002 totalled 10.2398 trillion RMB yuan (1.2337 trillion US dollars), increasing by 8% over the previous

year in comparative terms. The added value of the primary, secondary and tertiary industry amounted to 1.4883 trillion RMB yuan (0.1793 trillion US dollars), 5.2982 trillion RMB yuan (0.6383 trillion US dollars), and 3.4533 trillion RMB yuan (0.4161 trillion US dollars) respectively.

(China Country Paper, 4th APAC Ministers' Forum, Bali)

DISCUSSION OF THE ECONOMICS CONCEPTS AND TERMS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SI TASK

Opportunity Cost

Of the economics concepts and terms that I have reviewed with regard to applicability to translation, I find that of opportunity cost to be most relevant and important as it alerts us to the selective nature of translation. I believe that translation practice has been over-concerned with accuracy and equivalence and has failed to realize that everything, including the 'accurate rendition', has an opportunity cost tag. The concept of cost opportunity points to the antithesis of scarce resources/opportunities vs. unlimited possibility and emphasizes that the allowance for one possibility always constitutes an opportunity lost for other possibilities, which is exactly the case with what actually happens in translation.

The concept applies readily to all aspects of translation/interpretation but my favorite example is the selection of one rendition at the cost of others. For example, the term Gross Domestic Product, as it appeared in the China country paper, can be either rendered semantically into *guomin shengchan zongzhi* (国民生产总值) or simply repeated in Chinese phonetically as *Gidipi* (i.e., GDP). While both are justifiable renditions, only one of them can be used on any one occasion and the selective use of either one could be a matter of assumption (whether the Chinese audience understood the phonetic representation of GDP), a matter of necessity/convenience (whether the phonetic representation made an easier and effort-saving rendition in the given simultaneous interpreting situation), simply a matter of an individual interpreter's working style/preference, simply a matter of chance, or a selective and mixed consideration of the above matters.

Selective rendition is just one of many examples that can be explained by opportunity cost. The concept can be applied to many other sets of options with regard to the simultaneous interpretation of the China country paper, including the following:

- translation style (i.e., whether to translate literally, semantically or in a summary manner),

- translation subject matter (i.e., whether to translate the detailed information, rough ideas or meta-narrative of the paper)³,
- the translator's self-positioning in relation to other parties (e.g., whether to be close to the linguistic/cultural expectations of the speaker, to be close to those of the audience, or arguably to be neutral), and
- equally importantly, manners of preparation (i.e., whether to invest the time available in physical recuperation or speech preparation; whether to invest the time available in research dedicated to anticipating the speech or whether to invest the time in reading or even in prior translation of the script).

Cost

Though it is a commonly understood concept and is as readily understandable in conjunction with opportunity cost, cost as a basic concept warrants attention because of the following principles of economics. Firstly, cost is synonymous to pain in the cliché 'no pain no gain' and is necessary in order to generate a return. Secondly, cost must not be so big as to render a return unworthy or insignificant. Thirdly, and as a result of the previous two principles, cost can and must be managed and minimized in order to achieve a worthy or significant return. Fourthly and alternatively, cost which cannot be avoided can nevertheless be so managed as an investment or even part of the gain.

With regard to the China country paper, assuming that I, the interpreter, had decided that I set myself the objectives of simultaneously interpreting its detailed information accurately and adequately, I would have set myself an impossible task. I would have had to be able to understand and speak extremely fast, to convert between the English and the Chinese numeric systems and to tackle technical terms with total ease. I might also have had to undertake an intensive study of the script prior to the speech and work very intensively and attentively during the speech. All these would have combined to constitute a huge cost, i.e., cost of effort, attention and concentration which could all be converted into time, a worthy cost which could have been worth paying had I eventually been able to achieve the objectives.

However I might also have found the cost to be too huge and not worth it. I might then have decided that, if I were to try to speak so fast during the whole speech while also trying to tackle every single item of the information including every numeral and jargon, I as a mortal would undoubtedly incur some or all of the following costs: slips of the tongue, mental and physical exhaustion, loss of concentration and stamina, diminution of job pleasure as well as production and

delivery of an unintelligible rendition. And the principle of cost opportunity might also work against me, as some of the above costs combined would diminish my opportunity to satisfactorily tackle the whole of the speech and other speeches (and there were so many of them awaiting me as in any other conference).

Cost Minimization and Substitution

Assuming that I had decided this cost of time was too huge for a desirable return, I would have had at least two options. One option was to reset my objectives and design a new strategy and, by so doing, undertake a new cost (which, in economics, is known as cost substitution). For example, I might have decided that I would rather translate the meta-narrative of the speaker, as I actually did in the 4th APAC Ministers' Forum. I would then have a different cost structure to tackle than if I had stuck to literal or semantic translation. Personally, it would cost me less in terms of mental and physical outlay, as I did not have to be over-concerned with the many details required for literal or semantic translation. In the eyes of accurate and adequate translator, the cost would be much greater as the meta-narrative approach would seemingly cost the trees plus the branches and leaves, i.e., the many details and nuances of the speech while I was actually presenting my perceived version of 'the specter of the woods'.

Another option I could take was to manage and minimize the cost, especially if I had not been one of the 'radical' simultaneous interpreters that I was and if I did not want to associate myself with the **risks** that were involved in meta-narrative translation. One strategy of cost management and minimization was representing the figures in approximate terms. Thus, '10.2398 trillion RMB Yuan' would become 'about 10 trillion Yuan'. Another strategy was using either the Chinese or English system but not both. For example, a difficult sentence [China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2002 totalled 10.2398 trillion RMB Yuan (1.2337 trillion US dollars), increasing by 8% over the previous year in comparative terms] could be treated as [China's GDP in 2002 totaled about 1 trillion US dollars, increasing by 5% over the previous year in comparative terms]. Use of these strategies would actually reflect the spirit of opportunity cost, again reminding us that we do not live in a perfect world and would have to make sacrifices in order to achieve optimal results.

Risk

Risk is another basic economics concept that warrants detailed discussion and heads my list of economics concepts and terms applicable to translation. Like cost, it is also an indispensable element of any return or gains to be made and, therefore, it is also synonymous with 'pain' in the cliché 'no pain no gain'. If I insist in differentiating between risk and cost, there is the following to say. One, while cost is a sort of reality and is of a current and on-going nature, risk is a kind of uncertainty and a matter of perception unless an action that bears it actually takes place and it then surfaces in different sizes. For example, I would risk 'missing the trees' only if I were to translate the meta-narrative of the China country paper. However, I could avoid risking 'missing the trees' if I had other options available.

But then I would have to tackle other risks associated with those other options. For example, I could have chosen to translate the literal and semantic details of the China country paper. Then I would risk exhausting myself mentally or physically plus, as I was a mortal like everyone else, while I tried to grasp some trees, I would very likely risk losing many others in an impossible situation like the one I was in. This was a great comfort to me as I considered myself wise enough not to have taken this option. Furthermore, I could actually choose to avoid any of the above mentioned risks by taking no action. But then choosing to do nothing, especially for an interpreter sitting in a booth in the course of a major international conference, in itself would have constituted the most abysmal risk.

Another aspect of risk is that it is speculative in nature and usually proportional to the return, leading to the common wisdom about 'the higher the risk, the greater/smaller the return'. By comparison, cost tends to have a reversely proportional relation to the eventual return and can be minimized to generate maximum return. For example, the adoption of the meta-narrative approach could lead to a much more optimal return but also much greater risks than literal and semantic translation to some practitioners on some occasions. It would offer a much improved chance for the right personnel to complete a mission impossible, as I fortunately did in a real-life situation. But should I have failed, I might have got myself into all sorts of disasters. I might have conjured a mis-representation of the 'woods' by misunderstanding or distorting the intention of the speaker, or missed too many specific 'trees' important for the audience, or, by doing the above, damaged my professional reputation and standing.

Still another aspect of risk is that it is more like a personal perception until it becomes a reality and, in the form of either perception or reality, it impacts differently on different people. With regard to my experience with the China

country paper, I perceived (and sort of calculated) the risks involved in a meta-narrative translation approach to be less grave for myself than if I had chosen to translate literally or semantically. For another interpreter, one who was much younger than me with much readier speaking/listening organs, greater stamina and concentration power but with less knowledge about the official Chinese discourses, less experience in research and less developed anticipatory ability, the literal or semantic approaches would apparently carry significantly fewer or smaller risks.

I saw the meta-narrative translation strategy as less riskier because I judged myself to have great anticipatory power, research ability and knowledge about the dominant Chinese discourse. Other considerations which informed the decision included my self-confidence, experience with the approach, a strong aspiration to salvage something out of a mission impossible and, very importantly, peer support by my booth partner. At the same time and to my disadvantage, I had only average competence in literal or semantic interpreting and, at a less than optimal age for a simultaneous interpreter, I was beginning to lose some sensor functions and suffer concentration or stamina insufficiency, which would hinder a literal or semantic rendition. On the other hand, considerations which might have biased me against the decision included 'rarity' of the approach, the nature and standing of the occasion as a top multi-national conference, attitude of the Chinese speaker and the potential damage to the professional **credit** and **credibility** of myself and of my agent.

Risk Management

Management of risks, a concept as important as that of risk in economics, involves a whole process of envisaging possible risks, making calculations to assess if they are worth taking, deciding whether to take them (desirably one should take only calculated risks) and designing strategies in order to manage and contain the risks that one has to take. In order to achieve the desired gains, one has to act and take risks but then one must not take risks blindly so as to render the gains unattainable or not worthy of the risks or even plunge oneself into an untenable situation. I discussed in the preceding paragraph how I envisaged, calculated and took the risks as part of the game plan to tackle the China country paper. Next, I would like to discuss briefly the following strategies that I designed for managing the risks that I chose to take to tackle the China country paper.

1. One strategy was to have a game plan, as I believed that, in most rational undertakings, having a plan, especially a well-informed and researched plan, is better than having no plan. My plan was to translate the meta-narrative of the

China country paper in the worst case scenario and to go into detail only if I had the chance. While the plan was intended to avoid the risk of total failure vis-à-vis a mission impossible, this game plan would bring on risks which I anticipated and thought I was able to contain/manage.

2. Another strategy was for the game plan to accomplish a well-defined and realistic objective rather than the best or the most accurate/adequate rendition. Thus I was keen to produce what I called a second best translation, one which strove to purposefully render one dimension rather than every dimension of the paper. That is, I chose to translate mainly the meta-narrative of the paper and, by doing so, minimize the risks associated with the accurate/adequate SI approach.

3. Still another strategy was for the game plan to identify all the possible risks imaginable so as to possibly design risk-based (I could also say problem-based) solutions. The risks included:

- Misunderstanding or distorting the meta-narrative of the speaker;
- Missing too many details important to the speaker or the audience;
- Mis-reception of my SI approach and style;
- Not living up to the expectation of the top-level multi-national conference;
- Damaging the professional credit and credibility of mine and of my agent.

4. As the risks were identified, another strategy naturally surfaced, which involved designing specific solutions to tackle the specific risks. For example, in order to minimize the possibility of misunderstanding or distorting the meta-narrative of the speaker, I did the best I could to research into the script, studying it and discussing it with my booth partners and finding chances to seek advice from assistants to the Chinese minister. I also reflected on what high-ranking Chinese officials would most likely say on comparable occasions. In order to avoid missing important information, I classified the messages of the script hierarchically from essential (i.e., the meta-narrative of the Chinese government overcoming great obstacles to improve infrastructure for the people) to trivial (i.e., exact and fine statistics, e.g., 10.2398 trillion RMB Yuan or 1.2337 trillion US dollars). I decided that I would strive not to miss the more essential messages and would only tackle the more trivial details only if I had the luxury of time and even then I would only represent them in approximate forms (e.g., saying 'about 1 trillion US dollars' rather than '1.2337 trillion US dollars').

In order to live up to the expectations of the conference organizers, speakers and audiences and not to incur damage to the professional standing

and reputation of myself and my agent, I decided to pro-actively manage the expectations of those other people. For example, I did what I could for the various other stakeholders to appreciate the impossible nature of the mission, for the speakers to consider adjusting their presentation style in order to facilitate SI, and, last but not least, for the conference attendants to have a more realistic expectation/knowledge about what simultaneous interpreters could or could not possibly do.

5. A last but not least strategy was for the game plan to be flexible, indeed so flexible that it could be seen as consisting of a number of contingency sub-plans. I tried to envisage all the possible scenarios that the occasion might develop into, all the risks that might appear as a result of my action plan and possible solutions to those risks. I thought over what other things I would do as a rescue plan should the meta-narrative SI approach fail and what I would say if the approach was questioned by the other stakeholders.

There was yet another strategy which I took to minimize the risks. Knowing that the risks were associated with the rarity of meta-narrative SI as a new approach in comparison to conventional approaches, I tried to propagate the merits of the new approach as an alternative but valid and viable one, one which could be adopted as a last resort for the sort of impossible mission created by the China country paper. Disseminating knowledge about the new approach has evolved into a long-term mission for me, which I have been continuously trying to accomplish till today, hence the writing of this and other articles on re-articulating translation and game planning and translation. I believe that my capacities as a professional translation/interpreting academic and practitioner have made the mission a little bit easier.

Game Planning

I see game planning as much more than a concept or a jargon. It is a way of thinking, a kind of dynamic and rationalized thinking that has been developed to tackle a reality that is ever so complex, so dynamic and so ever-changing and hence it contradicts dogmas that view the world as a fixed entity that can be manipulated by a set of rules in a formula manner. Its presence in translation theory may be minimal, but it is not entirely new in related disciplines. For example, relevance theory, first formulated by Sperber and Wilson (1995) for human cognitive science and then adapted by Gutt (1992) for an interpretive approach to translation has elements of game planning as it attempts to explain the rationalized and interactive behaviours of recipients vis-à-vis originators of messages. According to especially Gutt (1992), translation theory should take into account the balancing of costs and effects by the readers/listeners as they

pick out and process that information which achieves the greatest cognitive effects for the smallest processing effort.

As discussed in this paper, cost opportunities, assessment and management of costs and risks and the like are all different aspects of a game plan. Earlier discussions of the above concepts and terms in the context of their application to a real life SI assignment were also meant to exemplify the workings of a game plan. Most important of all, game theory emphasizes options, selection and management of options to maximize benefits and minimize costs (and side-effects), processes which can be optimized through research. Also crucial to the effectiveness of a game plan for a SI assignment is that it must be informed by sound research on the basis of which reliable assumptions can be made, obstacles identified, objectives set, risks assessed, a hierarchy of strategies designed and substitute contingency plans made. From the above discussions, one would find that a game plan is always dynamic, task specific, problem-based and differs from one situation to another.

For example, to design a game plan for tackling the China country paper, I

- undertook focal research (i.e., studying the script and discussing with peer interpreters),
- identified specific obstacles for completing the mission (e.g., size of the paper and number of terms and statistics),
- set a specific and realistic objective for the task (i.e., a second best translation aiming at representing the meta-narrative of the paper),
- examined a range of SI styles as to their suitability to the task and then selected the meta-narrative style over other options (e.g., literal and semantic styles),
- formulated specific strategies (e.g., omitting the trivial details, reproducing the terms phonetically and representing statistics in approximate forms) to facilitate the meta-narrative style),
- envisaged and calculated the risks involved in the assignment itself, with the different SI styles (and the meta-narrative style in particular), with the different strategies and designed solutions for risk management.

OTHER USEFUL CONCEPTS/TERMS APPLICABLE TO TRANSLATION

So far I have presented a list of key economics concepts and terms and have introduced their usual definitions and also discussed their uses in the context of a real life SI assignment. There are many others which may not be exclusively

affiliated to economics but which are also applicable to translation and which I have used in discussions and teaching of translation. Next, I will provide a brief summary of the other terms, especially the ones that have appeared in my previous discussions.

Especially in a translation or interpreting lesson, I would try to replace certain conventional concepts and terms with the following ones. Where I used to talk about preparation (e.g., glossary preparation), I may now talk about **research** (e.g., **profiling** speakers, **envisaging** potential obstacles to an assignment). Where I used to quote ‘practice makes perfect’, I may now talk about **investment** generating **return**. Alternatively I may conceptualize the time spent as a kind of cost which must be managed for an optimal return. Where I used to concentrate on criteria, I may now explore **options** and **probability**. Where I used to expect compliance with standard rendition and practice, I may now urge students to source **options** of objectives and **options** of strategies that can be used to achieve the objectives. Where I used to conclude with an accurate and adequate rendition or practice, I may now demand students to **justify** their selected option (i.e., whether the objective is realistic, whether the strategy is effective, whether the cost is too excessive or whether the practice is ethical, etc.). Last but not least, where I used to talk about professional qualifications and accreditation, I may now talk about **credit**, **credibility** and **accountability**.

Ethics

I would like to conclude this discussion with the term *ethics*, not that it is alien to the discipline of translation/interpreting but that it both constrains and necessitates the economics concepts and terms that I want imported into translation studies.

In the discussions so far, I have sounded as if I had found a magic cure-all to the long-standing impasse where all other translation/interpreting practitioners and academics were trapped. No, I have no such panacea! To replace the myth created by the accuracy discourse with another myth is the last thing that I would do! I am aware of the limitations to the concepts and terms that I have tried to import into translation and interpretation. For example, there is an ethical limitation to the use of game theory under which translators and interpreters are not supposed to be creators of tall tales or unfounded messages. Under whatever circumstances, no translator or interpreter has the privilege of willfully massaging or distorting the messages of their clients. This is an ethical consideration which I can never allow myself or my students to overlook.

On the other hand, I always remind myself and my students of the following. We should realize that it is unethical not to see and recognize the imperfection, costs, risks and problems inherent to the current practice and

methodologies. It is unethical to assume accuracy, adequacy and perfection when they are utopias.⁴ It is unethical not to know alternative options available or not to think or try to construct strategies to identify and manage costs, risks and problems. So by setting realistic and optimal objectives, by identifying, sorting and managing costs and risks, and by finding solutions to specific problems, and by doing all the above pro-actively, we can ethically, in a realistic and manageable manner, look for ways towards satisfactory translation.

CONCLUSION

Further to earlier challenges to the accuracy discourse, I continued to search for a new discourse, i.e., a new descriptive language and terminology to be used in the discussions and teaching of translation/interpreting. In this paper, I have been able to present some preliminary results of my research, including a list of key concepts and terms borrowed from economics, including opportunity cost, cost, risk, management of cost and risk, and game theory. In addition, I also discussed in passing a number of terms of secondary importance, such as options, justification of options, investment, return, accountability and credit. For the key concepts and terms, I quoted their definitions and then discussed them in the context of a reconstructed SI assignment in order to espouse their relevance and suitability and exemplify their uses.

To replace the existing descriptive language and terms is not a language game. Believing that, as well as speaking language, we are also spoken by language,⁵ I introduced the new terms in order to generate a new perspective for practicing, studying, discussing and teaching translation. As my discussions of the terms in use indicated, the new perspective included new thinking that transcended (or at least complimented) the long established ideas about translation, i.e., accurate, adequate, faithful and objective translation. In the light of the new thinking, translation does not have to be all about implementing standards and rules.

Instead, it should preferably be about undertaking research and, on the basis of research, about constructing options, identifying difficulties, setting objectives, designing action plans and managing costs/risks to achieve maximum desired results. That is, all aspects of translation/interpreting, including preparation, operation, methodology, results and impact, can be rationally manipulated and controlled, subject to ethical considerations. As a result, translation/interpretation may lose all the certainty that used to be guaranteed by textbook-, standard- and rule-based routines. It promises to become much more rational, problem-based, objective-specific, realistic individually customized

and dynamic, which is required for effective translation and interpretation in a real and complex world.

Notes

- ¹ This article is based on a talk given during a 2004 international lecture tour to Yuntech University of Taiwan, Capital University of Beijing, Wuyi University of Guangdong and Guangzhou Foreign Affairs Translators' Association. I thank Professor Hui-wen Chen, Professor Feng Yi-han and Professor Zhu Qi-an of the above institutions for providing an opportunity for me to articulate, rethink and develop the ideas and logic which was to form the basis of this article. I would also like to acknowledge the generous support by Dr Stanley Song as my booth partner and reader of my research papers.
- ² *A Beautiful Mind* by S. Nasar (1998, London and New York: Faber & Faber,) provides an interesting biographical account of John Nash. For an introduction to how game theory works, a good starting point may be economics books such as J. Stiglitz (1993).
- ³ For discussions of 'meta-narrative translation', see Zhong (2005).
- ⁴ J. O. Gasset (2000) has an enlightening discussion of the utopia of translation.
- ⁵ I have been enlightened by Lacan's (1977) pronouncement about people being spoken by language.

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