

# What does Translation Involve?

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### 1.1 The difficulty of definition

Most of us are aware that translation plays an important role in our daily lives. For example, we sense that translation must have been involved if we read a Swedish crime novel in English. Sometimes we pay little attention to the fact that it is translated, but occasionally something stands out: perhaps characters in a Swedish city speak English, and this incompatibility makes us aware that what we are reading has been written by someone who is not the author given on the book cover.

Dictionary definitions typically give a very narrow sense of translation: to translate is to express the sense of (words or texts) in another language (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 2008:1532). But it is also possible to think of other instances which, although they do not involve different languages, still seem to have something in common with rendering a Swedish crime novel into English. A new audience needs to know what someone has said, but there is a barrier of code, register or style. Consider the following example:

- (1.1) The woman in the station Enquiries Office said: 'There's been a big . . .'  
She gave an apologetic shrug and a half-smile.

Is there any translation involved here?

The woman in the office uses gestures and facial expression to say something she is thinking, but cannot or does not want to put into words. Is she, then, translating thought into gesture? If we were to call this translation, then any speaking or writing would have to be considered a translation of thought into words. And this is indeed the view of some translation scholars (see e.g. Barnstone 1993:20). We might dismiss this as broadening the definition of translation so much as to render it meaningless. But suppose we say the woman's gestures are a translation, not of thoughts, but of unspoken words: to be precise, of the noun or noun phrase that syntactically would have to follow the word 'big' in (1.1); perhaps 'accident' or 'derailment at Stowmarket' or even 'cock-up'. Would this then be more of a translation than just putting vague thoughts into gestures?

If we are sure that it is not, because we feel that translation has to involve two languages, and not just thought and language, then what about a poem written on a painting, such as 'Marine Still Life', James Kirkup's poem 'after a painting by Edward Wadsworth' (Kirkup 2002:27). Is this a translation? Or an illustration that shows the 'Things' in *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak 1963)? In both these cases, there seems to be a transference of content between a non-linguistic and a linguistic representation. In 1958 Jakobson (2004:139) stated that such cases were 'intersemiotic translations' if the original was formulated in language. Turning the English translation of the Swedish crime novel into a film would thus be an intersemiotic translation, as would the illustration of Sendak's 'things', but writing a poem about a painting would not. For Jakobson, whose view of language was that it encoded meaning (2008:144), there must first be a process of decoding and this is only possible with an original which is a linguistic representation. Jakobson gives three types of translation; the other two are 'intralingual translation' (2004:139), which is the translation of, say, a poem in Yorkshire dialect into Standard English, and 'interlingual translation', which is what Jakobson, and almost everyone, regards as 'translation proper' (*ibid.*). This is the sort of translation exemplified by the first instance above: a Swedish crime novel in English.

Though Jakobson's categories – intersemiotic, intralingual and interlingual – may seem quite separate, none of them have exact defining characteristics. It is fairly clear, for example, that he would not regard the woman's action in (1.1) as intersemiotic translation, because 'semiotic' means to do with signs, and the woman's thoughts are not only not linguistically encoded, but they are also not signs at all, so 'translation' of thought to gesture only involves one semiotic system – gesture – and is by this definition not translation. What is less clear is

whether a translation of the original Swedish crime novel into an English film would be intersemiotic translation, for the definition of the latter, according to Jakobson (2004:139), does not involve crossing a language boundary. Perhaps we could say that the English film involves two types of translation: interlingual (Swedish to English novel) and intersemiotic (novel to film). In fact one could argue that the translation of the English version into an English film also involves two acts of translation, for the English version itself was already a 'proper' or interlingual translation, and so traces of its having been originally Swedish (such as Swedish personal and place names) will be part of the English text.

Before this discussion becomes any more complicated, it is probably worth just picking up the main points, which are as follows:

- (i) Some cases of translation would probably be deemed by everyone to be translations (the English translation of a Swedish crime novel).
- (ii) There are cases such as putting thoughts into words which some scholars would consider to be translations, but many people would not.
- (iii) Intersemiotic translations, such as novels made into films or poems captured in paintings, could reasonably be called translations.
- (iv) A translation might involve a change of both language and medium (such as an English film of a Swedish novel).
- (v) If a text that has already been translated is translated again (such as an English film of the English version of a Swedish novel), we might assume that the first act of translation plays a role in the second.

What the above discussion shows, then, is that it is not really clear what translation involves, a point made by many writers on translation (e.g. Munday 2009:5–9; Bassnett 1998).

Where one draws the boundaries between what is translation and what is not will depend upon one's views of language, thought and representation, and these will in turn be influenced by historical and personal context. But it might also depend upon issues of how we define such concepts as 'language' or 'dialect' or 'register'. For example, do the following qualify as translations?

- (1.2) The label on the iron says 'The clothes with protrude fal-lals: avoid the fal-lals. This must mean that you shouldn't iron over the beading.'
- (1.3) Once the reaction is triggered – the switch is flipped – the serotonin is then free to go back and float around in the space between the neurons.

(1.4) 'B – b – la' said the baby. 'He's saying "butterfly"', said his mother, smiling confidently.

In the sentences in (1.2), the second sentence translates into Standard English a sentence which is not Standard English. We can tell this because 'protrude' is not an adjective in English and 'fal-lal' would not be recognized by most speakers of English today as a word at all, though it was used by Hardy in *Jude the Obscure* (1974:114) in 1895 and is included in the 1976 *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, though not in the 2008. But what do we call the language of the label itself? Is it a sort of dialect? If so, is it a language, since one could argue that, linguistically speaking, a dialect is a language (see Crystal 2003:25)? Or is it an idiolect, the way the person (or machine) writing the label speaks English? Is a translation from an idiolect to a standard form of the language still a translation? And is the label itself perhaps a translation from a Chinese speaker's (imaginary or real) original Chinese instructions? In that case, perhaps it is less of a translation if there is no written original than if there is; this is again the question of whether thoughts 'count' for translation or not.

In example (1.3) further questions arise. Do we count the expression between dashes as a colloquial translation of 'the reaction is triggered'? But it is only marginally more colloquial than the first expression. Perhaps, then, it is a translation of a literal expression into a metaphorical one? But 'triggered' also seems metaphorical. An explanation which says that registers, which are different varieties of a language used in different contexts, count as languages for the purpose of translation will not really help here, because the register differences seem minimal. Many scholars have pointed out that metaphor (which means 'carrying over' in its original Greek, just as does originally the word 'translation' from Latin) is a type of translation (see Barnstone 1993:16). But if we are simply translating one metaphor to another (a trigger to a switch) then it seems that to say (1.3) involves translation would be to say that any rephrasing in different words is a translation.

In the case of (1.4), we have someone who understands the original language (the baby's babbling) translating to Standard English for the benefit of those who do not speak the baby's language. Whether we would call it translation or not might depend on whether we wish to regard the different stages in a child's acquisition of language as languages in their own right.

So it seems that not only is it unclear whether translation has to involve different languages, or whether thought counts as language, but that we must also now add the following to our list of points two pages back:

- (vi) We might consider different varieties of a language, such as idiolects, registers, personal styles or even different stages of acquisition as different 'languages' for the purposes of translation.

These are not purely theoretical questions. For example, whether dialects are counted as languages for the purposes of translation has possible repercussions for questions of power and authority. A dialect might be perceived as carrying less authority than the standard form of the language. Questions such as this, and their relation to description and prescription, are considered within sociolinguistics (see, for example, Milroy and Milroy 1991).

Questions about varieties of language and the power invested in them are also of great importance to such areas of literary criticism as postcolonial theory, and to areas of translation such as postcolonial translation (see, for example, Bassnett and Trivedi 1999, Tymoczko 2007). In the study of translation, such considerations are always tied up with questions about the ethics of translation, an issue to which we shall return in Chapter 5.

One way to deal with points (i) to (vi), all of which make it clear that translation is difficult to define, is to define it as a process rather than trying to define its source and end products. That is, we might say that any process of transferring one section of language into another, which says the same thing in different words, is a process of translation. This would leave open the possibility that any reformulation is a translation. And in fact this does accord with what many people feel, as the following section of conversation (adapted from a real example) shows:

(1.5) A: I don't quite, well, maybe, you know . . .

B: Let me translate: no.

B might speak in an amused or ironical tone, suggesting that 'translate' is not being used in its core or most obvious sense. Nevertheless, the fact that the meaning of 'translate' can easily be extended to include such cases suggests that such a process of reformulating feels like an act of translation to many people. It appears, then, that we can describe translation as a process which has a source text (the Swedish novel, the baby's babble, the speaker's stumbling words) and a target text (the English film, the mother's interpretation, the other person's clarification). If the source and target texts are clearly in different languages, it is obviously translation. If we are not so sure whether they are in different languages or the same language, it is less obviously translation, but

in a broad sense it is. If they are not languages but different sorts of representation (such as painting to poem), it is even less obviously translation.

But even if we accept that translation is best seen as a class of processes of the type that involves a transfer from a source to a target text, there is still another question we have to ask: What is it that is transferred in translation? Another way of putting the question (- a translation of the question -) is: What part of the language of the source text do we preserve?

In all the examples so far, we might say that it is content, or meaning, that is preserved. Intuitively, this seems correct. But consider the following example:

(1.6) 'Il pleure' means 'he is crying'

'He is crying' is not really the meaning of the French, but is an English translation. We often use 'means' to say 'is a foreign rendering of' because we intuitively consider English (or whatever our native language is) to somehow express the meaning directly. We think the English words *are* the meaning. Even if we leave aside this issue, though, it is not clear that 'He is crying' is an English translation of '*Il pleure*'. Suppose that the context of the expression '*il pleure*' was as follows:

(1.7) Il pleure dans mon cœur / Comme il pleut sur la ville (Verlaine 2001:25)

If '*il pleure*' means, or translates as 'he is crying', then we might translate (1.7) as:

(1.8) He is crying in my heart / just as it is raining in the town

But '*il pleure*' also suggests rain, because of the presence of what looks like an impersonal '*il*' ('it') with no antecedent, so perhaps:

(1.9) It is raining in my heart / as it is raining in the town

And yet, if (1.6) is in any sense correct, then the original French lines also mention crying. So a closer translation of the lines would be:

(1.10) There is crying in my heart, as the rain falls on the town

But this is not a good translation. It ignores the near-repetition of '*il pleure*' and '*il pleut*' by translating these phrases with two different verbs. It ignores

the repetition of the impersonal '*il V dans*' and '*il V sur*' (V stands for verb), which suggests that one's heart, by analogy with the town, is a place in which things just happen and are outside of one's control, a problem avoided by translations such as Sorrell's 'Falling tears in my heart, / Falling rain on the town' (Sorrell 1999:69). And, crucially, (1.10) ignores the fact that the third person of the present tense of '*pleurer*' (to cry) and '*pleuvoir*' (to rain) are close in sound, even though not etymologically connected, so that crying and raining could be said to be linked in a French speaker's mind more closely than in an English speaker's. This latter point is connected to the notion of Linguistic Relativity, which we will come to shortly.

These are all aspects of the style, or the way that something is said, as opposed to what is said. What the above discussion shows is that style is as important as content – perhaps more so – in translation. This is an issue that will be revisited many times in the course of this book.

But does it make sense to say 'he is crying' is somehow the meaning or content of '*il pleure*', as (1.6) suggested, whereas the style is something much more complex? To some extent, this does make sense, and leads us to one possible definition of style:

(1.11) Style is a set of weak implicatures

This is a definition based on Sperber and Wilson (1995:193–202) and it provides a useful way of understanding style and of understanding translation. In Relevance Theory, Sperber and Wilson's theory of communication, relevance is defined as the property of communicated utterances such that they do not involve more processing on the part of the hearer or reader than is appropriate to the amount of cognitive benefit derived. Such cognitive benefit, or cognitive effect, might be increased knowledge or changed ways of thinking. In this theory, explicatures are the parts of meaning directly encoded in utterances (1995:182) and implicatures are implications intended by the speaker (1995:182), but not made explicit. Weak implicatures are thus all those aspects of the meaning of a text which are left fairly open by the speaker. They are suggested to a greater or lesser degree. Literary texts typically contain a very large number of very weak implicatures, as has been frequently noted (e.g. Pilkington 2000:75–83). So part of what is implicated in (1.7) is the suggestion that '*il pleure*' represents an uncontrollable, natural phenomenon. That link is still there in (1.10), but it is much weaker than in (1.7). Interestingly, if style in literary texts typically consists of many weak implicatures, one might want to argue that (1.10), having even weaker implicatures, is even more

literary than (1.7). The reader has to work harder, this argument would go, and therefore would obtain more cognitive effects. This is the argument behind the idea that literary texts should not be too obvious, or browbeat the reader, and views of style differ historically in this respect. In spite of this possibility, if we consider translation as a process that captures the style of the original, then a translation such as that in (1.10), which ignores the links of sound present in the word '*pleut*' itself, as well as those suggested by the repetition of '*il V PP*' (where PP is a prepositional phrase), is therefore translating only a fairly small proportion of what (1.7) says.

The importance of the style, in which the similarity of the French words '*pleure*' and '*pleut*' (which might be regarded as a play on words, sometimes called paronomasia; see e.g. Wales 2001:287) is underlined by the repetition in the sentence, will not be unexpected to the reader of the text in which (1.7) occurs, because the text has other characteristics, such as being written in lines, that mark it out as a literary text. In a text such as the following, on the other hand, the fact that there are two words beginning with 's' and two beginning with 'p' would probably be considered irrelevant:

- (1.12) You will need a strong sense of responsibility and proven project management skills.

A translation of (1.12) into another language would be unlikely to try and preserve the alliteration of 'strong sense' and 'proven project'. In fact, if alliteration – the repetition of sound (usually consonants or consonant clusters) at the beginning of words – is assumed to be a phenomenon of literary texts, it is doubtful that these examples would be considered alliteration at all. However, alliteration is not in fact merely a literary phenomenon, and the translator of a phrase such as

- (1.13) 'Why money messes with your mind' (*New Scientist* March 21st, 2009)

would probably want to echo the alliteration in some way.

Are we therefore saying that literary translation transfers both content and style, whereas non-literary translation is only concerned with content? And, if we are, are we saying that the *New Scientist* title in (1.13) is literary, whereas the advertisement in (1.12) is not?

The possible answers to these and other questions will form an important thread running throughout this book. But we can consider preliminary answers

now, with the caveat that there is much more to say. One possible answer to the first question would be to say that yes, style is in general important in literary translation and not in non-literary translation because the main difference between literary and non-literary texts is a difference in the role of style. This is the difference expressed by Ross when he said: 'literary texts are not just about something; they do that thing' (1982:687; see also Iser 2006:58). This could be taken to mean that literary texts express meaning through iconicity, the stylistic phenomenon in which the language used physically resembles what it represents, rather than doing so in a purely arbitrary way. If arbitrariness is the basis of the form – meaning relation in language generally, a view that goes back to Saussure (1966:67–70) but is generally accepted in linguistics (see e.g. Pinker 1999:2–4), then one could argue that iconicity undermines or overturns this relation (see e.g. Lee 2001:77). Here are examples of iconicity:

(1.14) *twitter, bark, ring*

(1.15) *flash, flutter, fling*

(1.16) *We must not use no double negatives*

(1.17) *Out of the corpse-warm antechamber of the heavens steps the sun*

The examples in (1.14) are words which sound like the sounds they represent; this is referred to as onomatopoeia. Those in (1.15) illustrate a weaker type of iconicity, generally known as phonaesthesia: the consonant cluster 'fl' seems to suggest quick movement, but it is not a direct representation of movement, or speed. However, because 'fl' does not mean anything on its own, so the sequence is not simply a result of morphology – the structure of words in terms of meaningful elements – or etymology (their origins), many writers (e.g. Anderson 1998) would argue that the words in (1.15) illustrate iconicity. The example in (1.16) demonstrates syntactic iconicity: the syntactic structure of the sentence – the way its words are organized and the relationship between them – mimics what it says. And the example in (1.17) is also an instance of syntactic iconicity in which the line length, the difficulty of pronouncing 'heavens steps' and the position of the noun at the end of the line all echo the movement of the sun.

(1.17) is my translation of a line in a poem by Ingeborg Bachmann (in Boland 2004:94; for further discussion see Boase-Beier 2010a). If, as Ross says, poems do what they say, then (1.17) is an example of this; it is in fact translated in this way because Bachmann's original German also mirrors the

sun's movement in a similar way. But Ross's statement could also be taken to mean that poems do things to their readers. In fact, the idea that language does things is a common one, and informs Speech Act Theory (e.g. Austin 1962); this includes the notion that, for example, by saying 'I baptize you Christopher' you actually do so. This example, just like those in (1.13), (1.14), (1.15) and (1.16), suggests that the difference between literary and non-literary texts is not clear-cut, because all these examples are, or could be, from non-literary language, yet the notion that texts do things to their readers is the basis of literary theories such as Reader-Response Theory (e.g. Iser 1979) and more general discussions of what defines literature (e.g. Attridge 2004; see Chapter 6). Iser (1979) argues that literary texts leave gaps that the reader has to fill. So if, for instance, the text in example (1.1) appeared at the start of a novel, the reader would be bound to imagine not only what noun goes in the space, but what might have happened in the story, and what its consequences might be. Iser (1979), in speaking of gaps and the reader's involvement, anticipated work such as that of Pilkington (2000), mentioned above, in which readers work through possible weak implicatures.

What this brief discussion of style has suggested is that the style of a literary text goes beyond its content to allow the text to do something besides just saying something, whereby what it does might be to echo a particular meaning in its form, or to make the reader supply a meaning (or indeed to do other things that this book will explore). If the translation of such texts does not go beyond content, the translated texts will only say something but will not 'do' anything and therefore could be considered not to be literary texts at all. But to return to our second question – is (1.13) in some sense more literary than (1.12) – we might recall that the notion of a text 'doing something' to the reader, just like the more general notion of style, is not confined to literary texts. Nevertheless, there are texts, such as that in example (1.12), whose style seems unimportant and where the translation could focus merely on content. Such texts will almost always be non-literary. Thus we can say that style always matters in literary translation, but conversely cannot always be ignored in non-literary translation. To the extent that style is an essential element in a text we might even want to say that it forms part of content or meaning, and that therefore a distinction between content and style (or what is said and how it is said) is at best an idealization, especially in literary texts.

The discussion above has made the implicit assumption that, when we say 'literary translation', we mean the translation of literary texts, assuming the definition of a literary text discussed in the last few pages. This is generally the

sense in which I will speak of literary translation in this book. However, it is possible to use 'literary translation' as a term meaning the literary translation of non-literary texts, that is, a translation that takes into account the ways in which the text has literary elements, or characteristics, or effects. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

It seems common sense that, if the original text is a literary text such as a novel, the translation will be a novel, too. Or if the original is an advertisement, the translation will also be an advertisement. That this is not always the case is suggested by earlier examples, such as the making of an English film from a Swedish novel or the writing of a poem about a picture, where the original is not a text at all. Considerations such as these might lead us to ask what a text is. A picture would not usually be considered a text, but a film might possibly. A simple definition of text might be 'a stretch of writing or speech, not necessarily complete, which is the object of observation or analysis' (Wales 2001:391). This is in general the sense in which I will use 'text' in this book. It might include headlines or stretches of conversation, and also poems, advertisements, books, newspaper articles and so on. It will not in general include films or photographs.

Taking this simple definition of text as a starting point, then, it is reasonable to say that translation is a process that preserves meaning, style and text-type. We have already seen some exceptions: meaning was not kept in example (1.9) nor register in (1.13). And another exception, even based on the fairly narrow definition of text just given, might be a book like Burnshaw's *The Poem Itself* (1960), which includes prose translations of poems, and could be said to involve a change of text-type.

The question of text-type, and whether it is preserved, is clearly important for translation. The theory of text-types developed in parallel with text linguistics especially in Germany and the Netherlands, and overlaps with such areas of linguistics as text grammar and discourse analysis. Text grammar (e.g. van Dijk 1972) was originally an attempt to move away from the focus on the sentence common in the work of linguists such as Chomsky (e.g. 1965) and discourse analysis is the analysis of language in use (e.g. van Dijk 1977). A brief discussion of these links can be found in Wales (2001:392). It seems clear that such ideas will be interesting for translators, because translation, especially of literary texts, has always been assumed to operate at a higher level than that of a sentence (see Qvale 2003:7–17).

It was the theory of texts that formed the basis for an important study of translation by Reiß and Vermeer in 1984. They argue that a text is an action,

with a producer and recipient, and has a particular aim to fulfil (1984:18). The situation in which the original and translated texts are produced and received is subject to a vast array of linguistic, social and cultural influences. From this complex, detailed and loosely organized work the term *skopos*, or translation aim (1984:29) was taken over to become part of the vocabulary of translation theory, not just in the original German (see e.g. Agnorni 2002). Reiß and Vermeer point out that the *skopos* of a translation will include preserving or changing the text-type of the source text. Frequently the text-type will stay the same, as part of the necessary coherence between source and target texts (1984:171–216), though, as Reiß had pointed out in a much earlier work, especially in the case of literary translations the function of the target text might differ from that of the source text (Reiß 1971:104f.) as in the examples we saw above (see also Nord 1997:9–10 for discussion). Most of these ‘functionalist’ approaches, as Nord (1997) calls them, are not specifically concerned with literary translation, though Nord herself (1997:80–103) does discuss the particular ‘poetic effect’ that a literary text has on its readers as one of the functions of literature. In this sense, and in keeping with other German theories of text-types, which usually see the literary text as one of a number of such types (- others are journalistic texts, instructions and so on -) it can be seen that knowing the characteristics of a particular text-type is an essential prerequisite for the translator. Such knowledge might, for example, determine or affect the degree of freedom the translator has to deviate from the source text. This freedom will be linked both to the need for a translator to interpret the original (Nord 1997:85), as well as to the extent to which a text describes a state of affairs in the real world. Thus Kleist’s *Der zerbrochne Krug* (1973), a German play originally set in 1770 on the German-Dutch border, can be translated into an English play set on the Yorkshire-Lancashire border, as happens in Blake Morrison’s translation *The Cracked Pot* (Morrison 1996). Because the events the original play describes are assumed to be fictional, they can be set in England for an English audience. But it would not be considered acceptable to translate a report on an experiment performed on the German-Dutch border, and which had appeared in a scientific journal, in such a way that its English translation said the experiment had been conducted on the Yorkshire-Lancashire border. We might argue, then, that the fictionality of a literary text confers the freedom to change its content. But ‘fiction’ is not a clear-cut category in literary texts. What about literary biography, or novels based on historical events, or poems about the Holocaust? These will be semi-fictionalized accounts of the events, but it is not clear how much licence would generally be accorded to

their translations. It might seem that the greater the degree of fictionality in the text the more important the style will be, and the more the translation will need to focus on style. However, it will not always be the case that the degree of fictionality and the importance of style are in direct proportion. A poem, for example, might have a high level of stylistic patterning, and yet the translator might feel constrained by the content or situation that gave rise to the poem. Thus Michael Hamburger, writing about translating Paul Celan’s poetry, feels strongly that he should not make ‘a merely aesthetic game of the existential struggle’ (Hamburger 2007:421) which was the subject of much of Celan’s poetry. Celan wrote many poems about the Holocaust, in which both his parents died, and eventually himself committed suicide. It is easy to see why a translator of these poems would feel more constrained by a notion of content than in, say, a translation of a nursery rhyme. Literariness might be assumed to depend to a great extent upon fictionality, but there are degrees of fictionality.

Another way to describe literary texts is to characterize them, as Nord (1997:82) did, as having poetic effects. Poetic effects are defined by Pilkington (2000:26) as the cognitive effects that a text has on its reader and that arise during the processing of the text, including searching for contexts in which it can be understood (2000:77,189), working out implicatures, or interpreting attitude. These effects may be general cognitive effects such as rearranged structures of knowledge or enhanced beliefs, and also, according to Pilkington, the emotional and affective states of mind (2000:190,191) particularly triggered by poetic texts.

Similarly for Attridge, literary texts evoke creative reading, that is, a type of reading which involves the reader in ‘a suspension of habits, a willingness to rethink old positions’ (2004:80), and this type of reading is signalled by the form of the text (2004:111).

In both these views, then, poetic effects result from the work done by the reader as such work is directed by the text (Pilkington 2000:190), and thus these views are partly a further development of the work of Ross (1982:682), who said poetic texts do things to readers, and of Iser (1971; 1979), who described how texts leave gaps for the reader to become involved with (e.g. 1979:19). These gaps may be places where there are actual gaps (see Boase-Beier 2004 for an example) or ambiguities that enable the reader to consider several possibilities at once. Such processing of possible cognitive contexts can happen in any text. But, whereas a scientific report of an experiment may involve processing and understanding on the part of the reader, it is unlikely to

involve interpreting the writer's attitude or experiencing feelings of fear or joy or empathy. A work of popular science, on the other hand, will employ elements of literary style in order to involve the reader more. The popular science book *Evil Genes* (Oakley 2007), from which the example in (1.3) is taken, describes psychopaths both in terms of genetic variation, in a way unlikely to evoke emotion, and also in the following terms:

- (1.18) Psychopaths are so scary that roughly a quarter of psychology professionals who meet one wind up experiencing . . . hair standing up on the back of the neck, crawling skin, the 'creeps' . . . (Oakley 2007:52)

This is written in a colloquial style as the phrases 'wind up', 'crawling skin' show and the most colloquial expression, the 'creeps', is given as though it is a quotation from one of the psychologists in question. The effect of this is to make the reader think of people she knows who cause similar effects, to think about the physical symptoms, because they are listed, or to imagine the various associations of the 'creeps': creepy music, darkened houses, unexplainable phenomena and so on.

What this description does, then, is to cause cognitive effects of various types in the reader which seem similar to, but less complex and open-ended than the sort of poetic effects a literary text could be assumed to give rise to. A translation that merely conveyed the more scientific information about genetic variation and translated (1.18) as though it had said:

- (1.19) . . . psychology professionals who meet one experience a number of typical physical symptoms of fear

would risk not having any poetic effects on the reader but only the non-poetic cognitive effects of increased knowledge.

As we move on beyond the first five chapters that form Part I of this book, we shall consider what it means to see the style of texts not merely as a formal textual entity, nor just as a representation of a cognitive entity, but as itself a cognitive entity, and the effects of this view on translation. In other words, style is not just ways of saying but has as its counterpart ways of thinking, and their effects on the reader are, as Attridge (2004:80) quoted above, suggests, not just the appreciation of style or the experiencing of emotion but also more radical types of rethinking. This is the view behind cognitive poetics or cognitive stylistics, as it is sometimes called, a discipline situated at the cross over of linguistics and literary studies. Cognitive poetics is described by Stockwell

(2002:1–11) as a way of talking about the reading of literature which explains how particular readings are arrived at (2002:1–11), taking into account the ways the mind works, and not just the way language in a literary text works. Following Jakobson's 1958 statement (see Jakobson 2008), Stockwell uses the term 'poetics' to refer to all types of literary text, as I shall frequently do in this book. One of the particularly interesting consequences of cognitive poetics for translation is that it suggests a translation is not merely concerned with transferring the surface features of a source text into a target text, but that, because a text embodies a cognitive state, and has effects on the cognitive state of its reader, so also does its translation.

Another important aspect of cognitive poetics is that it sees the literary mind not as something that only comes into play when a literary text is to be read, but as the mind itself. In other words, not only are elements of style such as metaphor or ambiguity ways of thinking, but they are ways of thinking that are central to our cognitive functioning (Turner 1996:4–5). We can examine such aspects of style especially well by examining literature because it is here that many aspects of the mind such as the blending of concepts, the creating of analogies, the forming of narratives and so on, can be seen particularly clearly. If the literary mind is simply the mind, and the ways of thinking that literature requires are simply good examples of the way we think, this suggests that a literary text is simply a good example of a text. What this means is that translation of non-literary, as well as of literary texts will need to be concerned with stylistic figures and devices, with the cognitive counterparts of textual stylistic elements and with poetic effects. All texts will contain metaphor, because metaphor is central to the way we think, and by the same token texts of different types will all contain what we tend to think of as literary figures such as ambiguity or iconicity, as in examples (1.14), (1.15), (1.16) and (1.17). If there is a difference between literary and non-literary texts, and thus between literary and non-literary translation, it cannot be a purely linguistic one. To find out about translation, then, it makes sense to concentrate on those texts where these elements have the greatest role to play. Literary translation is a particularly good example of translation. The distinction between literary and non-literary translation is one to which we shall return in Chapter 2.

Up to now our discussion has been mainly about what elements of a text are preserved in translation. Some elements that we have considered are meaning, style and the type of text with its functions and characteristics. A further question we have to ask of translation, aside from what it transfers, is what it *can* transfer. If we recall the discussion of example (1.7) above, one of the issues

was that the French words '*pleure*' and '*pleut*' were similar in sound. Thus there is a mismatch between what the source language can do and what the target language can do.

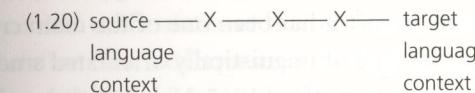
There has been much controversy, within both translation theory and linguistics, about the extent to which such mismatches suggest different ways of thinking. It is possible to hold different views about this question. One view would say that French and English people habitually think differently in some ways, and the languages encode these differences. This is a fairly uncontroversial view, known as Weak Linguistic Relativity (see Gumperz and Levinson 1996 for discussion). A stronger view is that, because the languages do different things, it is impossible for an English thinker to ever make the same link between crying and raining. This is Strong Linguistic Relativity, and is not accepted by most linguists or translation specialists today. It seems clear that an English speaker can understand the link between 'cry' and 'rain', once it has been explained, and possibly, in this case, even before it has been explained, because of the similarities of crying and raining, and their consequent association in images and metaphors, even as far back as Hildegard of Bingen in the twelfth century (Biedermann 1992:277). Generative linguists, in arguing against Strong Linguistic Relativity, have a tendency to ignore the consequences of Weak Linguistic Relativity. Pinker, for example, argues that Relativity is either untrue (in its strong form) or uninteresting (in its weak form; see Pinker 2007:124–151). In fact, Linguistic Relativity in its weaker forms is extremely interesting for translation. If a particular meaning in one language is not habitually expressed in another, then there are no easy ways to translate this meaning from the first to the second language, especially in texts in which style plays a major role, and where involved explanations are thus inappropriate. An example is the use of '*wenn*' in German, which means something close to 'if, and if so, when' in English. There is no conjunction in English with this meaning. This does not, of course, mean that the meaning of the German conjunction cannot be expressed, nor the concept conceived of, in English. I have just expressed in English what it means. But if it is used in a German poem, its translation risks losing compression or ambiguity (see Boase-Beier 2006:119–120; 2010). We will return to the question of Linguistic Relativity and how it affects translation in Chapter 2.

The simple definition of translation as the transfer of content between languages can, then, be seen to hide a number of questions about what counts as a language and what is actually meant by 'content', and whether this includes style, as well as questions about the extent to which the function of a particular

text-type is preserved, and about the extent to which languages allow such transfer. But there are many other questions about the nature of translation, and the next section considers one of the most fundamental.

## 1.2 Source and target

A further set of issues, perhaps less obvious than those we have just considered, concerns the place of the translated text in relation to the source and the target contexts. This is a set of issues with various different emphases. If we were to take 'context' to mean linguistic context, and assume that a translation is always situated at some point on a scale between source and target languages, we might represent this as follows:



The translation may be at any of the Xs on the line between source and target, or at any other point along the line. A translation may be closer to the language of the source text or of the target text. Here are some examples; the source text is a German idiom and appears in (1.21); possible translations follow in (1.22), (1.23) and (1.24):

(1.21) Es ist gehüpft wie gesprungen  
it is jumped like sprung

(1.22) It's the same whether you jump or leap

(1.23) It's as broad as long

(1.24) It's all the same

It seems intuitively clear that (1.22) would be to the left of the scale in (1.20) and (1.24) to the right. Of course, (1.22) would not be at the far left as it still sounds more like an English idiom than does the gloss in (1.21). (1.23) keeps the idea of a comparison expressed metaphorically, so would be in the middle of the scale. (1.24) does none of these things.

The discussion in Section 1.1 about meaning and style has shown that, if one tries to separate the two – 'the what' from 'the how' – then it could be maintained that the meaning or content is kept in all the above translations, but the style is only kept in (1.22) and (1.23). So, one could argue that in terms

of linguistic closeness to source, attention to style is more important than meaning. Alternatively, and as the discussion in 1.1 suggested, one could argue that style is part of the meaning. In Relevance Theory, as we have seen, it is possible to explain this by saying that the style embodies a set of weak implicatures which are additional to the explicatures in a text. Implicatures of (1.21) are that there is a balance of two similar actions, that the outcome in each case is likely to be the same, that the reader must visualize two actions which have different words to represent them but only seem different in execution in a very minor way: the sort of thing where one would have to weigh up the differences. Indeed, weighing up and finding little difference seems to be the main point of the idiom in (1.21). In this sense, (1.23) might be said to capture its essence rather well.

But the sort of degrees of closeness that (1.20) illustrates might not just be a question of linguistic equivalence. In fact it has been one of the main criticisms (see e.g. Venuti 1998:21) of the type of linguistically orientated studies of translation carried out in the 1960s (e.g. Catford 1965; Nida 1964) that they focused too much on the linguistic detail of the text and ignored such things as cultural background, the expectations of the audience, the allegiance of the translator, or the cognitive context of the various participants in the translation process. Though it is not true that they ignored such issues (see also Tymoczko 2007:31), they reflected the concerns of linguistics at that time. And developments in linguistics, including views of communication, of context and of mind, which go beyond the obvious linguistic structures of text, have had a strong influence on the way views of translation have developed.

One of these developments is the increasing concern with pragmatics. Pragmatics, or the study of language use rather than structure (see e.g. Verschueren 1999:1–11), dates back to the early 1970s, according to Mey (2001:4) and was developed because a focus on context-free syntactic phenomena in the generative grammar of that time left too many language phenomena unexplained. In stylistics, these developments were often expressed in terms of a growing concern with context (see, for example, Verdonk 1993:1–6). Equally important has been the recent growth of cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics. All these developments have had profound influences on the way we view translation (see Boase-Beier 2006:15–21). Both ‘contextualized stylistics’ (Verdonk 1993:2) and ‘cognitive stylistics’ (Boase-Beier 2006:19), also, as we have seen, called ‘cognitive poetics’ (Stockwell 2002), are concerned with what is behind the text in the mind of author, reader, translator or critic, influenced by individual knowledge, belief and experience and shared knowledge of beliefs, which

we can refer to as ‘culture’ (see, for example, Sperber 1996). Cultural objects, events, beliefs and knowledge always form part of the background against which a translator must work. This background also includes such things as historical and current political situation. Especially in views of translation that have been influenced by literary theory which focuses on this type of context (rather than just on the text itself), such background elements will be of great importance, as in, for example, the study of the translation of postcolonial texts. Bassnett and Trivedi (1999:2) point out that, when considering the cultural as well as the linguistic boundaries translation crosses, in fact translation ‘rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems’. We have already noted in passing that the power relationships between languages, cultures and texts will play a role in even such a fundamental issue as what constitutes a language. In translation, notions of language and power are central to the status of the translator, the translated text and the ethics of translation. The latter question involves the importance of not mentally adapting everything to our own narrow way of seeing. For the moment, and to keep things simple, we merely note that another way of measuring closeness to or distance from source or target along the lines of (1.20) would be to consider cultural, rather than linguistic closeness. An example such as (1.25), taken from a German advertisement for a car, illustrates this

(1.25) Katzensprung zur Kiesgrube  
cat-jump to-the gravel-pit

The phrase can be taken to suggest (in conjunction with a picture showing a family getting into a car with sunshade, ball, etc.) that it is no problem, if one buys the car in question, to take a quick trip with the children out to the nearby man-made lake for a swim in hot weather. Possible translations of (1.25) might be:

(1.26) A stone's throw to the lake

(1.27) Be at the beach in the blink of an eye

(1.28) Have a picnic!

(1.26) preserves some cultural elements of the source text, in that the idiom ‘*Katzensprung*’ in German is replaced by an equivalent in English (‘stone's throw’), and the notion of a family trip out would, at least given the illustration, be as clear as in the original. However, (1.26) would be strange and even

slightly far-fetched in the English context. (1.27) tries to echo the alliteration of the original, which is more noticeable than the assonance in the expression ‘stone’s throw’, and (1.28) uses a completely different strategy, playing on the double meaning of picnic as an open-air meal or something done easily.

The difference between German and English habits is great enough for (1.25) to pose real problems in translation: in England we do not have a typical mental representation (called a ‘schema’; see Cook 1994:11) for getting out of town for a couple of hours to a water-filled gravel pit to swim and sunbathe. If we were translating into Inuit or Hausa or any language generally used in countries with no gravel extraction, the cultural difficulties would be much greater.

But closeness and distance might not only be measured in terms of the linguistic or cultural elements in the text. In a cognitive view of language and style, the likely thoughts and feelings embodied in a text, the likely effects on a reader, the work that a reader has to do, are of central importance. As we saw in Section 1.1, the reader will typically have to work harder to understand a text if it contains gaps, uncertainties, very weak implicatures and ambiguities. Consider the following three lines from a poem by R.S. Thomas:

- (1.29) The wrinkles will come upon her  
calm though her brow be  
under time’s blowing.

(Thomas 2004:282)

A first reading suggests an enjambmed (or run-on) structure: ‘the wrinkles will come upon her calm’ as in ‘waves will disturb the calm’ when speaking of the sea. Even though the rest of the sentence does not make this reading syntactically impossible, as one could understand ‘though her brow be under time’s blowing’ to mean ‘though her brow is affected by the passage of time’, by the end of the sentence it seems semantically unlikely. ‘Though’ should introduce a contrast: ‘she will get wrinkles even though subject to time passing’ does not make sense. Therefore the reader assumes the correct interpretation is that ‘her’ is the object rather than ‘her calm’: ‘the wrinkles will come upon her’ even though she now appears calm.

This process of leading the reader in one direction only to change direction suddenly is known as ‘garden-pathing’ (see e.g. Ferreira et al 2000; Pinker 1994:212–217) and is also behind the sense of mild shock one feels in instances of zeugma such as:

- (1.30) On the first evening she found a bed and breakfast and total happiness.

Here the shock (and pleasure) is not so much, as in (1.29), a feeling of having followed a path to a dead end but of having found the garden path leads to, say, a peacock’s cage, rather than the expected back door of a house. It only works because ‘a bed and breakfast’ suggests one sense of the verb ‘to find’, but then ‘happiness’ suggests another.

One might therefore decide that this effect is the most important thing about (1.29); so a translation should not lose it, as in the following example:

- (1.31) Die Falten werden über sie kommen  
the wrinkles will upon her come  
(Perryman 1998:18)

Here the object of ‘come upon’ is clearly ‘her’ (*sie*) and not ‘her calm’; the garden-pathing effect has not been judged important.

Though the above discussion about (1.29) and its translation reflects the recent concern in cognitive stylistics with poetic effect, the discussion of effects on the reader in translation goes back a long way. Both d’Ablancourt in 1654 (in Robinson 2002:158) and G.H. Lewes in 1855, for example (1855:27), stress the importance of considering how the effect is to be kept.

Effect in translation has often been judged (e.g. by Chesterman 1997:35) too tenuous a thing to measure and comment on because of different readers’ contexts. Cognitive poetics is particularly useful here, as it allows us to describe precisely how the effect of (1.29) interacts with different possible cognitive contexts, so that the different possibilities of translating it can be seen more clearly.

The above examples illustrate several possible ways of achieving closeness – linguistic, cultural and cognitive – between source and target text. But the very notion that what translation does is to establish such closeness or equivalence, though intuitively it seems reasonable, cannot just be taken for granted. This is a point to which we shall return in Chapter 2. For the moment, it is enough to note that there are different degrees of such equivalence; this is the difficulty behind interpreting scales such as that in (1.20) as well as scales such as that given in Munday (2009:8), which map different strategies.

But even taking equivalence (of whatever degree and type) for granted, there are clearly other factors than textual ones, even in an extended sense, that affect the source-target relationship. We could also consider such influences

on the translator's practice as ethics, ideology, loyalty and so on. Venuti (2008:15), discussing Berman (see 2004), suggests that the translator has an ethical duty not to lose the foreignness of the source text. Though one of the tenets of postcolonial translation theory is that this is particularly the case when the source text is in a language embodying less power than will the target text, one could argue that the preservation of what is foreign, other, different, in the source text is a consideration for any translation, as indeed many earlier theorists, and especially Schleiermacher (1992:152), have pointed out. Thus we might consider ourselves ethically bound to show that, for example, French links crying and raining phonetically. This is also true in cases such as the word for summer and the various tenses of the verb '*être*' in French. Here the lexicon, or mental dictionary, or a speaker of French might show a phonological link (- one of sound -), but not a semantic link (- one of meaning). Consider the following example from Claude de Burine (Sorrell 2001:76–77):

- (1.32) Mon été étincelant et tendre  
C'était toi

Martin Sorrell translates these lines as

- (1.33) My sparkling and tender summer  
Was you

because, as he says in his Translator's Preface, the sound repetition in (1.32) is 'accidental' (2001:12). But might not the fact that French uses the same word for 'summer' and the past participle of the verb 'to be' (as in *j'ai été*, 'I have been / I was') be significant? That it is significant for this particular poet is suggested by de Burine's frequent use of the word '*été*' in her poems, and its close juxtaposition with images of time (see e.g. Sorrell 2001:24;34;56). But the play on its meanings is also used by Apollinaire in '*Carte Postale*' (2003:306). To treat it as accidental, then, seems to risk losing some of the essence of the French language exploited by its poets. But to try to retain echoes of the French, assuming that the poet's usage is a matter of choice rather than accident, is only one way of interpreting Venuti's 'call to action' (2008:265) and he himself was careful to say that he was not necessarily speaking of actual mimicry of the source text (2008:252). His term 'foreignisation' (2008:97), much used since he first introduced it in his 2005 book, is sometimes taken to mean 'echoing the foreign (i.e. source) text' and this was indeed the sense in which Berman, originally writing in 1985, but translated into English by Venuti (as Berman

2004), used it. Venuti himself uses 'foreignization' for a broader set of strategies than Berman: making the target text foreign *per se* (2008:263). This brings his concept of foreignization closer to terms such as 'foregrounding', used first in Garvin's (1964) translation of the work of the Prague Circle of Linguists. Foregrounding, which has since then become an important term in stylistics (see e.g. van Peer 1986, Leech 2008), means drawing attention to something in the text. Thus Venuti's foreignization could be seen to mean drawing attention to the foreign – which is also, in Prague Circle terms, the literary – nature of the target text, irrespective of the actual linguistic elements of the source text. On the broadest view of foreignization, then, (1.33) would be a foreignizing translation because the syntax (- the sentence structure - ), by swapping the expected positions of the noun phrases 'my sparkling and tender summer' and 'you' in the sentence, foregrounds them both, just as 'What a piece of work is a man' (Shakespeare 1956:873) draws attention to both elements of the comparison in a way that 'A man is a piece of work' would not. On a narrower, more mimetic interpretation, (1.33) does not echo the *été* – *était* link.

We can understand translation ethics in terms of doing justice to the source text, and thus link the concept to such notions as Dryden's concept of 'paraphrase', which he described in 1680 as the ideal, and which always keeps the author in view (992:17), as well as to Nord's 'loyalty' (1997:125). Venuti's ethics of foreignization (2008) are clearly about loyalty to the act of translation, rather than to the source text or author, but for Nord, though loyalty is felt to both source and target, it is to the people involved in the translation process rather than to the process itself or the texts. The point behind (1.32) might thus be seen as Burine's pun rather than an issue of French lexis, and a pun, rather than a link between being and summer, would be the focus of the translator. Thus in terms of loyalty to Burine one might translate it as Philip Wilson (p.m.) suggests:

- (1.34) That sparkling tender summer  
You summed it up.

This is a translation that aims to reproduce the play on words, as the assumed intention of the poet. If the translator of (1.34) had seen (1.32) as embodying a fact about the French language rather than an intentional play on words, he might have translated as follows:

- (1.35) The world sparkled softly that summer.  
You were there.

Issues such as ethics, loyalty and audience expectations and effects might seem to be both abstract and outside the remit of linguistics or stylistics. But in fact they have practical consequences, because they all express a fundamental question in translation, and it is this: should the source text be presented in translation on its own terms or those of the target language? Does the reader of *Burine* in translation want to get a sense of the French language, and the sort of lexical and semantic link a French reader would make, or to experience a similar link in English?

This is the question behind many translation theories, and was explicitly formulated by Schleiermacher in 1913 (see 1992:42), who said that the translator can either bring the source text towards the target reader (that is, make it easily readable on the target language's terms) or take the reader towards the source text (that is, translate so that the source text has to be understood on its own terms). It is also implicit in views such as Venuti's concern with foreignization (though less so in his concern with the translator's visibility) and in postcolonial theories of translation (see e.g. Bassnett and Trivedi 1999).

It could be argued that meeting the text on its own terms demands greater work on the part of the reader, and is therefore more compatible with the way literary texts work. This is, then, a question that relates to such issues as the role of creativity on both the translator's and the reader's part, and we will return to this in Chapter 3. It is also a question about the function of translation, sometimes expressed as the difference between 'documentary translation', which aims to give an accurate picture of the source text – such as example (1.22) – and 'instrumental translation' (see Nord 1997:50–52), which attempts to preserve function or text-type. Thus it might be argued that (1.28) aims to work as an advertisement slogan in its own right, rather than telling us what the original said, or that (1.33) is itself a poetic line, in the sense that the reader needs to engage with it, and that both are examples of instrumental translation. It is important not to confuse 'instrumental translation' (a translation that preserves function, including literary function) with 'instrumental text' (a text with a 'predetermined end' as Attridge (2004:7) puts it). One could argue, as Attridge does (2004:6–10), that the function of a literary text is not to have a function. An instrumental literary translation could, in this sense, be said to be exactly that which results in a non-instrumental text.

The question of documentary versus instrumental translation gives rise to another question. Whereas documentary translation could be seen as a report on the source text, as instrumental translation is something much more autonomous, and this raises the question of whether the aim and text-type of the

translation need necessarily have any relation at all to those of the source text. Consider a well-known translation of a literary text, say the translation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Schlegel and Thieck (1916). Clearly the German Schlegel-Thieck *Hamlet* is intended to be a play. It will be performed and audiences will go to see it. It has the same text-type as the original. If, however, *Hamlet* is translated for German schoolchildren, in order that they can study the text in class, the text-type of the translation is obviously a different one, though it will still have some characteristics of the original play-text: it will involve dialogue rather than narrative, and so on.

A translation can, then, clearly be of a different text-type from the source text. But it is also possible to maintain that translations are *per se* a different text-type from non-translated texts. If this is so then we need to reconsider whether the 'fundamental question' I gave above – does the translation aim to give the reader a view of the source text on its own terms or on those of the target language? – needs reformulating. We perhaps must instead ask: should we see a translation from neither source nor target perspective, but as a text with its own set of characteristics? This is a question likely to be fairly irrelevant in the case of many non-literary translations. A set of instructions for a camera or a brochure for tourists are likely to be translated in such a way that the translated text addresses whatever needs the target audience has: to operate the camera or to visit the region (c.f. Gutt 2000:47–54). The fact that the text read by the target audience is a translation is likely to be unimportant, and not even known by the audience. Even literary translations can sometimes work like this. A German translation of the children's book *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (see Kerr 1968), for example, is not necessarily read as a translation. But the Schlegel-Thieck *Hamlet* or the translation of a Swedish crime novel are potentially different. Here the audience will almost certainly be aware that the text is a translation. This might be especially the case where a text has several roughly contemporaneous translations, such as Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, translated several times in the last 20 years, for example, by Kinnell and Liebmann (1999), Paterson (2006) and Arndt (1989). A reader might compare any particular translation with the others. She or he might also be aware of reading the work of Paterson, or Arndt, as much as Rilke. Some literary translations, such as Ted Hughes' *Tales from Ovid* (1997) are in fact often read specifically because of the importance of the translator.

In all these cases, it makes sense to see the translated text as demanding a different sort of reading from a non-translated text, suggested to the reader by the presence of a translator's name along with the original author's on the

book cover, and, often, a translator's preface, footnotes and the original text on facing pages, especially in the case of poetry.

There have been many discussions about how the translated text is seen in terms of its difference from an untranslated text. For example, I have suggested (see Boase-Beier 2006:146–148) that a translated text multiplies the voices, implicatures and other poetic qualities of the source text. Other writers have argued that the two types of writing are different in that the ideas or content of the text are already given (Hamburger in Honig 1985:175), or that different creative processes are involved (Trask in Honig 1985:14).

We will come back to this issue in Chapter 4, and suggest that in fact the translated text is read as a blend of an existing source text and an imagined untranslated text in the target language. It will combine elements of both source and target languages and of source and target cultural situations, and demands of the reader that it be read with both contexts in mind and as the work of two authors.

## Possible and Impossible in Translation

2

### Chapter Outline

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## 2.1 Translation and Linguistic Relativity

The discussion in Chapter 1 showed that a clear definition of translation is difficult: some things are clearly translations, some are not and many are somewhere in between. Translation is also constrained by what is possible, and it is to the question of what translation can and cannot do that we now turn.

Much has been said (see, for example Heidegger 1957:163; Barnstone 1993:18) about the possibility or impossibility of translation. There are two main reasons why translation might be considered impossible:

- (i) in literary texts, meaning and form are assumed to be closely linked, so an act that threatens to separate them seems doomed to failure
- (ii) languages might represent the world in incompatible ways

The first point has to do specifically with literary translation, and it will be the contention of this book that understanding the nature of the form-meaning link in language – understanding how style works – is one of the prerequisites for translation, especially of literary texts. I return to this issue in the next section.

It is to the second question that I wish to turn now. If languages do represent the world differently, then it seems there can never be complete equivalence of meaning in two languages. If complete equivalence of meaning is the aim of translation, then (ii) suggests it might be impossible.

One way out of the dilemma is to argue that translation is not about absolute equivalence of meaning. Catford said we replace a source-language meaning with a different one in the target-language which functions in the same way in a given situation (1965:20). Many studies of translation have been concerned with whether or not it creates equivalence of function, of effect, of connotation, or of communicative intent (see Munday 2008:36–53 for discussion). The perception that older, linguistically based, studies have a naïve view of what constitutes equivalence is a common one, and was expressed particularly by Snell-Hornby (1988:22). But in fact such older studies were very aware of the lack of equivalence between languages, as linguistic and anthropological works of the time (e.g. Whorf 1956) suggested. This led to the notion that there were different types of equivalence. Nida (1964:159), for example, used the term formal equivalence to mean that the form in the target language was similar to that in the source language, and dynamic equivalence (1964:159), later functional equivalence (de Waard and Nida 1986:vii), to mean that the function was similar.

In Nida's later work it becomes clear that the distinction between formal and functional equivalence is not easy to maintain. Though still working (as was Jakobson, whom we met in Chapter 1) broadly within what is known as a 'code-model' of language, in which 'communication is achieved by encoding and decoding messages' (see Sperber and Wilson 1995:1–64 for discussion), Nida and de Waard (1986: 13) place emphasis on the fact that 'the form itself so frequently carries significant meaning'. In this they reflect a more pragmatic understanding of language, as do Sperber and Wilson, who argue that a code-model must be supplemented – though not replaced – by an inferential model (1995:3) which allows us to focus on intended inferences (implicatures) in texts, and to see style as a set of weak implicatures, as suggested (see 1.11) in the previous chapter. A move from seeing meaning as encoded in the text to seeing meaning as left open for the reader to make inferences about has potentially profound effects on the notion of equivalence in translation, and how we describe it, as Tymoczko (2007:7) points out.

As pragmatic theories of language and communication such as Sperber and Wilson (1995), which first appeared in 1986, have had direct or indirect effects on translation studies, so the question of equivalence has largely been avoided.

Since Holmes (1988) mapped out the interaction between descriptive and theoretical research in translation, the focus has been on the types of translation that are actually observed. Toury (e.g. 1980) had by then already begun to initiate what is now called Descriptive Translation Studies, focusing on 'facts of real life' (1995:1). This broad descriptive basis makes it possible to say that equivalence has to be determined by what people regard as equivalent in a particular case or genre or historical period (Toury 1995:37,61; see also Malmkjær 2005:15). For Pym (2010:64), it is a useful idea that became less popular with the advent of functional and descriptive theories, remaining, however, a necessary illusion (2010:165).

But redefining equivalence so that it does not mean 'having exactly the same meaning' is only one way of solving the problem in (ii). If languages do not represent the world in equivalent ways, the other way to solve the problem is to split (ii) into a strong and a weak form, rejecting the strong and accepting the weak, as the latter is compatible with translation. These are the two views as applied to translation:

(iia) languages represent the world differently and thus make speakers of different languages think differently, so translation is not possible

or

(iib) languages represent the world differently but we can in principle think anything, so speakers of one language can both grasp and express a meaning habitually only expressed in the other.

(iia) is what one might call the translator's version of Strong Linguistic Relativity (with strong Determinism), while (iib) is the translator's version of Weak Linguistic Relativity (without strong Determinism). Note that Linguistic Determinism – the view that language affects thought – is, as Gumperz and Levison (1996:23) and Crystal (2003:15) also point out, always a prerequisite for Linguistic Relativity: people who speak different languages presumably only think differently (Relativity) if the language is causing the difference (Determinism). However, as (iia) and (iib) show, Determinism itself, like Relativity, also tends to have stronger and weaker forms: the strong form in (iia) suggests that we cannot be free from what our language makes us think, whereas a weaker form, as in (iib), only accepts that language influences thought. Confusingly, and wrongly, it is often maintained that Linguistic

Determinism is a strong form of Linguistic Relativity; this seems to be the view of Pinker (2007). From a translator's point of view the important thing is that (iia) and (iib) are strong and weak versions of a view that complete equivalence is not possible.

There has been much controversy and confusion surrounding the terms Linguistic Determinism and Linguistic Relativity, which are usually seen to derive from the work of Sapir and Whorf (see, for example Whorf 1956), anthropologist – linguists who studied the languages spoken by American Indians. As Malmkær (2005:48–50) explains, Sapir and Whorf were motivated by a desire not to impose Anglo-American categories on the thinking of another culture. This was of course a laudable aim, and it is exactly the aim that forms the basis of much recent and current thinking in literary criticism and translation, often expressed using the term ‘otherness’. It is the notion behind Venuti’s foreignization, Kristeva’s feminist criticism or Attridge’s view of the special nature of the literary text, to give just three examples (see Venuti 2009:97; Kristeva 1986:252; Attridge 2004:123). It is in fact not just a laudable aim, but a common-sense one: it is unlikely that one’s own view of the world is intrinsically better than others (see also Tymoczko 2007:15–53).

Conflicts arise both in the degree to which Linguistic Relativity and Linguistic Determinism are seen to obtain, and in the question of their interdependence. As Gumperz and Levinson (1996:24), point out, Linguistic Relativity is not the same as linguistic difference: the latter can be taken for granted.

Conflicts around Linguistic Relativity and Determinism have arisen particularly in linguistics and literary theory, usually for ideological reasons. Generative linguistics, based on the work of Chomsky (for example 1957, 2000) and others, such as Pinker (2007), mentioned above, is concerned to demonstrate universal language structures, realized differently in different languages. Much modern literary theory (for example post-structuralism), on the other hand, is keen to focus on the differences in cultures, world views and languages. However, most scholars of any area reject strong Linguistic Determinism, the view that language determines (rather than influences) the way we think.

What can seem particularly strange to theorists of translation is the need so many people apparently feel to be in either the relativity camp or the universalist camp, but it helps to remember that different researchers have different aims: a psychologist will want to know what linguistic determinism or relativity might tell us about the brain, a pragmatic linguist will be particularly concerned with the effects of context, and a translation studies researcher will be interested in many additional factors that affect the process and reception of

translation. Pinker, for example, who is a psychologist, argues that Linguistic Determinism is wrong and Linguistic Relativity is right but ‘mundane’ (2007:135). In fact, one would expect a psychologist to find the effect of language on thought more interesting than language itself. For a translation scholar, on the other hand, such interactions are far from mundane. Even weak linguistic relativity (as an observation, rather than as a theory, hence no capitals) is highly interesting, partly because it is almost certainly true to some degree (as even Pinker admits) and partly because communication, and therefore translation, are concerned with differences in tendencies, with likely ways of interpreting, likely connotations, with inferences and with such things, in literary translation, as poetic effects.

Also from a linguist’s point of view, as indeed must be the case for any theory that deems both stability and adaptability to be essential (see e.g. Spolsky 2002), it is exactly in the interaction of what is universal and what is language-specific, or culture-specific or context-specific, that one finds explanations for the way language works. Relativist linguists like Gumperz and Levinson (1996), rather than adopting a position midway between universalism and relativity, as Malmkær (2005:48) suggests, and as even they themselves suggest (1996:3), are simply accepting the likelihood of interaction. For the translator and the translation specialist it is the nature of the universal-specific interaction that makes translation both possible and interesting (see e.g. Tabakowska 1993:128).

To take a concrete example, Boroditsky (2004) shows that languages with different grammatical genders for objects are strongly correlated with different perceptions of whether the objects in question are ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’. She describes tests which found that Spanish speakers, whose language classifies bridges as grammatically masculine, describe them as ‘big, dangerous, long, strong, sturdy and towering’ whereas German speakers, whose language classifies them as feminine, typically describe them as ‘beautiful, elegant, fragile, peaceful, pretty, and slender’ (2004:920).

Pinker would presumably say that, because a Spanish speaker is *able* to see a bridge as pretty or slender, this shows that Linguistic Determinism is nonsense, and there is nothing more to be said, because there is never anything to be said about Linguistic Relativity. However, as Gumperz and Levinson point out (1996:7–8) we can still ask whether gender differences merely reflect cultural distinctions or whether they influence them. A translation scholar will want to know more about the circumstances under which such differences might influence thinking, if they do. Supposing one were to consider the

translation of French '*la lune*' and '*le soleil*', the moon (f.) and the sun (m.), into German, where the moon is grammatically masculine and the sun feminine. What differences and difficulties does this cause? How can German gender be made to fit the gender of the classical deities and in fact that in many ancient religions the moon was portrayed as the wife of the sun (Biedermann 1992:224)?

The reason a psychologist such as Pinker finds such problems uninteresting has to do with what one expects of theory. If theory (whether linguistic, literary, or about translation) is measured against real examples in order to judge whether the theory – one's mental picture of the world – needs adjusting, then some events and situations will not provide any evidence that such adjustment is necessary, and so they will be uninteresting. But there are other things one can do with the relation between theory and what it describes. The experiment with Spanish and German speakers might not tell us anything radically new about existing models of the mind, but it does tell the translator that connotations might be quite unconscious for most speakers, yet still play a role in the way an entity or a text is perceived. For the theorist of translation, it would be very interesting to know whether translators unconsciously take such connotations into account. In other words, a theory such as Linguistic Relativity might tell us about language use in context (Gumperz and Levinson 1996:8) and therefore also in the context of actual translation.

There is, though, a further reason for the confusion surrounding the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, especially when consequences for translation are drawn from it. Malmkjær (2005:46) suggests that theorists such as Halliday (1978:185) said it was not possible to say the same thing in different registers of a language. And yet, close reading of Halliday makes it seem more likely that what he was actually saying was that 'the same thing' *can* be said in different registers but means something different. For example, we might say 'snicket' or 'passageway' and feel they mean the same but are just put differently. Halliday's suggestion, as I understand it, is that they are different in meaning to the extent that the first is talking about a specific kind of passageway which perhaps only exists in the areas in which the term is used and the other about a much less specific type of passageway. This observation, if taken also to apply at the level of languages, is particularly interesting for translation, because it suggests that what appear to be equivalents might not actually have the same meaning. It is not that it is impossible to imagine a Spanish bridge with feminine qualities, or to talk about it, but that the word '*Brücke*' in German and the word '*puent*' in Spanish do not mean quite the same to speakers of the respective languages.

This is what Jakobson said, too (2004:139). To say that if you say the same thing in Spanish and German, or English and German, you mean something slightly different, does not have as a logical consequence that you cannot say the same thing in both languages. In other words, if the examples in Chapter 1 '*Es ist gehüpft wie gesprungen*' (1.21) and 'It's as broad as long' (1.23) do not have exactly the same connotations for their respective native speakers, this is not at all the same as saying that an English speaker cannot picture and talk about the image of jumping and leaping nor the German speaker imagine breadth and width compared. Neither strong Linguistic Determinism nor strong Linguistic Relativity nor the impossibility of translation follow from the linguistic difference. What does follow is that the translator does not have a straightforward task. This misapprehension – that from 'the same thing' in two languages meaning something different follows that one cannot translate – is the worst of the several confusions surrounding the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis.

## 2.2 Literary and non-literary translation

The existence of linguistic and cultural difference is one of the reasons some people might think translation impossible. The other reason given at the start of this chapter – (i) on p. 20 – is the close connection between form and meaning in literary translation. If the act of translation separates form and meaning, preserving only the latter, then literary translation (and the translation of any other type of text in which the form and meaning are closely connected) will be impossible.

Again, there are a number of issues to consider here: is the meaning of a text to be found in its representation of the world (or any world) or do its formal features carry (non-representational) meaning in their own right? In what sense is the meaning of a literary (and therefore fictional) text true?

A moment's thought will allow us to see that literary texts do not, or do not solely, represent the world. To some extent they can be said to represent different worlds, which may be merely fictional or even actually impossible, when measured against the world we know (cf. Gavins 2007:12). They may contain talking animals, thinking plants, or travel through time. But it is not just that the worlds they represent are not recognisable as what we call the 'real' world. Authors such as Samuel Beckett have tried hard to make their writing not represent anything else, that is, not conjure up a world the text refers to. If the