Orchids in the Botanical Gardens, Beijing, China

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THE EMERGENCE OF THE TEACHING OF TRANSLATION

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Introduction

This article is a first attempt to examine the emergence of the profession of teaching translation in Europe. One should be cautious about generalising and the pattern may not apply to, for instance, Chinese translation history as discussed by Eva Hung in this book (pp xxx). But in Europe the emergence of translation teaching is, to some extent, based on social factors, as well as being a process in individual teachers towards increased consciousness of their role in society. I also suggest that a discussion of these factors sheds some light on the emergence of 'translation theory'.

The founding fathers of translation studies had no classroom and essentially no students

they could address: their pronouncements are musings based on their own work, possibly developed into precepts to be followed by those who translate texts (implicitly) of the same type. The thinking has nearly always used one major, but limited, approach to the complex communicational system involved in the act of translation. Hence the shifting loyalties from 'author' to 'word' or to 'taste', hence the erratic jumping from 'objectivity' to 'subjectivity', in a 'theory' which, it is claimed, started with St Jerome and which has evolved over centuries. Rather than affecting the actual practice of translation work by translators (most of whom were blissfully unaware of the existence of incipient theory), these forefathers prompted critics and other translators of a philosophical ilk to agree with or gainsay them. This led to only isolated strings of thought, rather than interchanges of ideas and a consistent development towards a collective insight. Quite different are those people, bilinguals for instance, who have always been around and have (normally unsystematically) assessed the work of translators; thus also applying criteria of quality.

Professional translation activity did not appear out of the blue, but was the outcome of numerous developments: the beginnings of professional translation in Europe date back to the 17th century; but I posit that the profession became important when, in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Europe, developments made it necessary to teach foreign languages on a large scale. The first factor was the French Revolution, the aftermath of which was indeed equality for more people and the introduction of merit as an important factor for social advance. Education became a common good. Industrialisation with mass-production and improved infrastructures in terms of better road systems, steam ferries, and railways, made international communication and travel easier. Accordingly, the importance of mastering foreign languages became eminently clear to the rising middle classes. The new reading masses craved for something to consume, including books for education and entertainment, and translation from foreign languages was an obvious means for adding to home-grown produce in order to acquire such material.

A stylised picture of language acquisition vs teaching of translation

We are in no way dealing with a clearcut picture. We are dealing with trends, strands, developments and movements which I isolate and on which I impose some order, and a figurative, stylised one at that: yet, although this has no one-to-one correspondence to real life, in which conditions are never the same in different institutions, countries and cultures, there is still some underlying truth in my statements.

Thus even the hard evidence about the emergence of language professionals illustrates both the divergence and variety of scenarios as well as the fact that some essence common to all can be distilled.

Maria Sainz (1992: 132) describes how in Uruguay translations made by legal translators became mandatory for legal work in the late 19th century after the authorisation of Public Translators was introduced in 1885. In Denmark, the first professional translators were employed by the State in 1635:[1] they worked at Elsinore where they had to translate into Danish the lading documents of foreign ships which paid the 'Sound Dues', at that time a major source of revenue for the Danish Crown. The translators were few and translated indiscriminately from all languages, with nautical terms and the words for export articles as their main area, thus indicating that normally word-for-word translation has served the purpose. The title 'autoriseret translatør' was introduced in 1782. I suggest that this is the general pattern in Europe: the professional translators appear when trade, legislation,

bilingual administration and the like demand that words and documents must be understood in more or less the same way in different cultures and can be intersubjectively (and naively) referred to as 'the same' with the same implications for people speaking different languages.

In the 19th century, then, foreign language acquisition and teaching gain ground and become important. It is a problem in our context that foreign languge teaching and foreign language acquisition tie up with the ability to translate so that it is impossible to find evidence of any translation teaching per se. It must have been an element of foreign language teaching, although national variations were doubtless great.

The major leap forward intellectually is the introduction of a distinction between the learning of one (or more) foreign languages, and the teaching of translation as a separate activity between specific language pairs.

In Denmark, professional translators founded a school, 'Translatørskolen', around 1910 which operated courses (in translation) on a commercial basis. They attracted mostly people already employed in business, trade, or law. At this particular school, where I attended a few classes back in 1960, teaching was rigidly prescriptive and carried out by individualists. This school ceased operating around 1970 when its functions were finally transferred to a state institution, the Copenhagen Business School.[2] The point to note is that the decisive factor in establishing the teaching of translation is a recognised social need for this to be done: in this case first by the professionals, whose motivation has also been to improve the status of the profession, and, subsequently, by society at large, i.e. the State.

So, after this brief outline, I wish to turn to some of the parameters which, in my view, are prerequisites for discussing the teaching of translation and its dialectics with translation theory.

The ideology of teaching

Teaching has an obvious ideology: above and beyond anything else it believes fervently, ardently and intensely in the idea of progression. Of course, we usually take a metaview of this feature and consider it as a movement from primitive ignorance to sophisticated knowledge, although this is more often merely a movement of a few degrees towards the desired goal.

Teaching involves a triad of pupil, teacher and subject matter. It is a dynamic and social entity, worthwhile exploring in the context of this volume, especially as far as teachers and their own knowledge or mastery of the field are concerned.

The four generations of teachers

As hinted, one factor crucial to translation teaching is a natural evolution of a foreign language teaching tradition at a national level. This evolution normally spans at least three or four generations: the pioneers must appreciate the need to learn the foreign language and then learn it, in order to pass on language knowledge to the next generations, whose command becomes increasingly better. In turn the second generation train pupils who will go to foreign countries and learn foreign tongues to perfection. In due course, a few of their pupils will then reach the apex where they can study in the foreign language, and only the fourth or fifth generation will go in for full-blown research including translation studies.

A scheme illustrating this intuition and the tools teachers are most likely to use at the various stages looks as follows:

TABLE 1

PARAMETERS	Teacher attitude to language and translation	Teacher reliance on
Teacher background		
First generation	Uncertain	Tools (grammars, dictionaries)
Second generation	Uncertain (certain)	'Tools' (dictionaries, word-lists)
Third generation	Certain (uncertain)	'Tools' (dictionaries, LSP, native speakers)
Fourth generation	Certain	Critical use of tools

First of all, let me hasten to add that this is not meant as scathing criticism. It is merely an attempt to trace developments which are rarely discussed, but which must be raised to the conscious level to produce meaningful connections between individual, personal experience and professional work in societal contexts.

But then the comments: members of the first generation of foreign-language teachers will perforce sometimes be obliged by societal circumstances to carry out translation work, even if they are aware of their own inadequacy. They will rely on authorities for their tools, which usually means dictionaries, grammars and the like. What is more, they will not be willing to let go of these props. This implies that they will accept only a limited number of 'correct renditions' in the target language. Their adherence to props is evidenced by constant reference to the mother-of-all, the source-text: I contend that teachers of the first generation tend to be proponents of word-for-word translation.

Second generation teachers will have some of the same problems, but, thanks to their better background and to the fact that they have had reasonable solutions rejected by their teachers, they will accept that occasionally the tools may not be the final word. I suggest that this would also be the generation among whom we meet most of those practitioners who will add notes of their own to dictionaries and make their own word-lists and catalogues: they are the first to do translation on a tolerably regular basis. Once again the emphasis in translation proper will be on a literal translation, but there will be more deviation from the slavish word-for-word procedure.

The third generation will have been well trained in the foreign language and in translation and will therefore feel less dependent on, say, dictionary solutions and be more aware of the inadequate and weak points in relation to actual usage in the languages involved. Translation will stress fluency, and may well be on a sentence-by-sentence level.

These developments will, of course, continue, with the fourth, fifth and subsequent generations, never to a point where the translator is independent of tools, but merely where the 'best' balance is found between dependence on tools and possible target language options within a given text type and where the translator can transfer units of meaning into

appropriate functions in the target language.

The outline I have sketched can be amplified: as a line of progression it may apply to the individual learner and to various phases in the personal development of the individual teacher of translation. Personally, I believe (but I may be wrong) that I have moved from what I term the second to the fourth generation. Starting as foreign language learners, students not only move from first or second generations and have attitudes characteristic of these 'generations', such as demands for references to authoritative dictionaries and grammars, but, in relation to their teachers, should ultimately end up one generation ahead.

On the other hand, this movement will never reach its ultimate goal as far as translation is concerned because this activity involves too many factors, such as successful decoding, encoding, background knowledge, societal changes and the like. In relation to a non-native language, the translator will, in terms of *mastery* move along an axis from 0 to perhaps 90% proficiency.

And in relation to the native language, the mastery will, in translation, be perhaps 95-97% but, once again, never complete, because the source text will at all levels constitute a constraint, perhaps an unconscious one, but nevertheless a limitation in terms of the realisations in the target language, in the translator's mind: it is part of the awareness of translation and hence competent teaching of translation, to be fully conscious of the impossibility of the perfect translation.

In this particular context, I merely point out but do not discuss the inevitable dialectics between the tools at the disposal of translators and students of translation: students' and teachers' satisfaction and dissaffection with tools must be strong forces for, respectively, preserving or improving them (such as dictionaries) as well as for the development of new tools, methods and fields. Thus for instance we might point to a development in lexicography from small generalist via large generalist dictionaries to dictionaries in Languages for Special Purposes.

Yet the increased sophistication and degree of specialisation in the tools is an indivisible part of another axis of development, a chronological development from amateurism to professionalism, and, in the modern world, beyond professionalism to specialisation within all fields of human intercultural and international interchange. Specialisation calls not only for tools, but also for fora in which matters of mutual interest can be discussed (conferences, newsletters, journals), and for discussions of the principles underlying translational activity, 'theory' if you wish.

The 'certainty-uncertainty' axis

There is another important parameter determining teacher attitudes to teaching translation: the teachers' conscious or unconscious *knowledge* of his individual mastery of the source and target languages, which may have some relation to the objective 'mastery axis' I just mentioned, but is not identical with it. The 'certain-uncertainty axis' is a sensitive issue, only to be approached delicately and rarely touched. 'Uncertainty' will tie up with individual experience and knowledge of the languages concerned. It will connect with the handling of difficulties in decoding and encoding in the translation process, especially in the handling of tools of translation. It also relates to the assessment of 'quality', 'correctness', and 'error identification', which fact has immense repercussions on teaching attitudes. It influences teachers' views of colleagues and of discussions of matters pedagogical.

This part of the teacher-student-subject matter triad is, in effect, one which reaches far

into what the individual teacher will focus upon in translation classes. First generation teachers will be few and far between. They must rely on themselves and will more often than not be unwilling to admit to weaknesses in their mastery. Such weaknesses will result in loss of social status and, inevitably, in loss of authority. In Danish literary history there is a well-known episode involving foreign language teaching: as a young man, the celebrated dramatist and scholar Ludvig Holberg taught French in the Norwegian township of Kristiansstad in 1706/7. To his chagrin he found that he had a Dutch competitor. The two men criticised one another's French, and eventually they met for a public duel of words in French, both to realise that neither of them was very good. So, in French, they agreed to call it quits and to praise one another's French from then on. In other words: by keeping silent, they avoided admission of personal incompetence and consequent loss of status. But of course there was no interchange leading to an improved standard.

Another realisation of the certainty-uncertainty axis relates directly to the teacher-student-subject matter triad: this is in terms of the explanations proferred to students concerning linguistic and cultural realisations. First generation teachers will, mostly because they themselves are uncertain, avoid any explanations at all. Second generation teachers will go in for explicit explanation which is often wrong. Third generation teachers come up with explicit explanation which tends to be correct and based on thorough work. And, thanks to their superior command of the languages, the fourth generation will most often rely on intuitive explanations which are most often correct.[3] This in turn often collides with first-generation student attitudes to have things 'proved right' by reference to external authorities.

Generations and changes in emphasis

In social terms, it requires a minimum of foreign language mastery to be willing to discuss language and teaching problems with colleagues, and I submit that this willingness increases the more 'certain' one feels about language and translation. It also implies that in classwork first-generation teachers will focus more on what is indisputable and can be checked than will subsequent generations. Tentatively we might chart the development the way it is illustrated in Table 2 (overleaf).

TABLE 2

TEACHER Background	Priority	Wish to discuss	Focus in teaching
First generation	Survival	None	Lexis, syntax
Second generation	Survival	Some	Syntax, lexis
Third generation	Improvement	More	Syntax, fluency, lexis

Fourth generation	Improvement	Much	Fluency, syntax, lexis

In this case, I believe that variations in the focus in teaching will differ from language pair to language pair and, as I suggest in the table, from epoch to epoch: in Russia, I notice a very strong emphasis on lexis today. It corresponds to an approach which was on the wane when I started to learn English at Danish schools more than forty years ago.

Overall, the main development will be towards emphasising fluency, especially as more and more teachers come to realise that native speakers are not perfect either.

Source texts and directionality

This parameter is often, I suggest, reflected in the materials used for translation teaching: in Denmark, I have personally witnessed changes in terms of the texts used in translation teaching the way it is shown in Table 3 (on the opposite page)

I must stress that this is a stylised presentation of real life. On the other hand, it does have a relationship with some of the factors I have mentioned before. The use of back-translation as a tool for teaching and assessment connects with the 'certainty-uncertainty axis': the original source text is *the* perfect translation which the teacher can use as a yardstick for assessing the students' degree of success. In the choice of texts, there is a move from literary texts to all text types. The fact that teachers tamper with texts is, in my experience, motivated by their wish to improve the texts stylistically, and occasionally because they find something so hard to translate themselves that they do not expect students to be able to do so either. On the one hand, this then connects with the 'certain-uncertain' axis; on the other, to the gradual acceptance of their own fallibility.

TABLE 3

Teacher background	Number of books	Characteristics of texts used	Source of texts
First generation	Very few	Generalist language in Danish. DK>UK	English original translated into Danish
Second generation	More books	Generalist language Danish and English. Often edited. DK>UK and UK>DK	Authentic Danish and English texts. All text types.
Third generation	Own material	Generalist and specialist authentic texts	Authentic Danish and English texts

		Unedited DK>UK and UK>DK	

The most important step forward, is, in my view, the acceptance of a double directionality in translation. Firstly, it brings the real-life fact that most translators actually have to work in at least two directions into the reality of the classroom (McAlester 1992). The second point is fairly complex: translators make errors, but they do not make them deliberately. So, although they may be aware that specific translations of their own are not perfect, the concrete target text is, nevertheless, the best they can produce in the given circumstances. When they translate into a foreign language, errors in translation may cover the whole spectrum of lexis, grammar, and style (as long as it is not revised) without the translators' knowledge. In texts translated into the mother tongue, errors will tend to be lexical (that is semantic), whereas stylistic infelicities are rare and grammar errors few and far between. Single directionality makes it possible to use translation exclusively as an instrument for foreign language acquisition, for instance as grammar drills, and not as an activity distinct from language acquisition. Conversely, double directionality brings to light a number of factors in the translation activity which were ignored in single-directionality classes, such as the opaqueness of source-texts and the importance of fluency and style in target texts; and, especially when the target text is the mother tongue, students are in a strong position as far as assessment of 'errors' are concerned. Teachers will have to accept that they, too, are fallible, and provided their command of the language is good enough, they can even (occasionally) admit this without losing status. I suggested before in my discussion of the progression in teaching and generations of teachers that this admission of the non-existence of perfection is inherently part of translation. In class, this admission is a prerequisite for the the introduction of unedited source-language material from all text types, and for the acceptance of several translated versions of the same source text.

The transition I am discussing here is of immense importance to the teacher-student-subject matter triad which, as it were, expands. This is also where translation breaks away from foreign language acquisition, and thus paves the way for discussion of the principles of translation, sometimes called translation theory.

From secretiveness to collectivity and theory

In the last few parameters, I have begun to make the point that there are strong elements of a movement from secretiveness, exemplified in, for instance, individual translator word-lists to dictionaries available on CD-ROMs or translators' queries in the 'Internet', and from the dependence on what the 'authoritative dictionary' says, to the willingness to have one's language revised, and an openness about fallibility.

The movement is therefore towards welcoming other views. It is a movement towards being challenged, as it were, to open combat. It is a willingness to have views tested and rejected. It is a consciousness-raising process.

This is where the development in the teaching corresponds with theory: the intellectualising which makes it obvious that - if not a theory - at least principles open to discussion are needed for a deepening understanding of the procedures, methods and goals of translation. This interplay is illustrated in Table 4 on the opposite page.

This, then, points towards another axis, a chronological development going from

individualism to collectivism, from one secretive person who has to defend individual territory to collective bodies defending status and, one hopes, professional standards.

TABLE 4

Teacher Background	Attitude	Work orientation	Attitude to theory
First generation	Secretiveness	Practical	Anti-theory
Second generation	Little openness	Practical	Anti-theory
Third generation	Openness	Practical/theoretical	Positivist or general
Fourth generation	Discussion	Classroom practical/theoretical	Empirical or specific

And at yet another level there is the axis spanning from amateurism via professionalism to specialisation. This axis will apply to a considerable amount of theoretical thinking about translation and where professionalism is largely connected with Eugene Nida (1964), and specialisation (in my view) with developments in language for special purposes translation.

Concluding remarks

Teachers of translation have not invented translation theory (or, better: 'Principles for and Factors in Translation'), but they have forced it to take a firmer stand. My point is that before there was a massive societal need for translators, there was no need for moving beyond belletristic wanderings. It is the societal need, which was primarily made obvious by the appearance of translation and interpreting school and their staffs, which called for the intellectualised props that qualify as 'theory': it is no coincidence that Savory could find mutually conflicting points on what constituted a translation in 1969, but it is a misconception to believe that any of these conflicting views represented a theory.

At that point, things had begun to move towards other areas, for the simple reason that the existence of new text types calling for more faceted models of understanding had become painfully obvious. Similarly, it is becoming gradually clearer that the old translation principles and 'theories' based on binary, predominantly Indo-European, contrasts must be supplemented to serve as explanatory models for a more internationalised world.

The era of fora for translators had also begun, but centred mostly on matters of common interest: status and earning money.

Of course the latter also applies to teachers who have literally to survive, but they also need to understand what they do and why, perhaps not always for themselves but in order to explain better to their pupils. They are part of the intellectualisation process important for the creation of systematic sets of principles.

As far as such a set of principles is concerned, I personally find the views of Karl Popper as applied to translation theory by Andrew Chesteman (1994) a most satisfying approach.

But here we are once more back to teacher personality. And finally let me stress here that this overview is also part of the consciousness-raising leading to theory: if nothing else, this article has, hopefully, contributed to a certain metaunderstanding which makes it possible for each of us to define our roles in relationship to both our students and to our preferred theories a little better.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Flemming Koue and to a special anniversary issue of Translatøren (47 # 3 (1985)) for information about the appearance of 'translatører' (Public translators) in Denmark.
2. Information from Flemming Koue.
3. These fine observations on changes in teacher explanations were originally made by Tjaša Miklic of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

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