This article was first published in: Snell-Hornby, Mary & Zuzana Jettmarová & Klaus Kaindl (eds.). 1996. *Translation as Intercultural Communication*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 45-56

Translation as imposition vs translation as requisition

Cay Dollerup, Copenhagen, Denmark

In this article I shall discuss societal forces which propel texts in source languages to become translated. My examples will be Danish, but they are discussed for their paradigmatic and international, rather than their specific and national value.

I hope these observations will contribute to make endeavours in translation work for cultural transfers more successful in today's world where numerous new nations are establishing their identity, in terms of past and present, industry, trade and culture. In the last field, the most significant element, in the eyes of intellectuals, is that their national art and literature should be recognised, enabling them to aspire to the coveted international symbol that this goal has been reached - the Nobel Prize.[1]

One persistent feature in discussions of translation practice and theory is the acceptance of the movement from left to right, that is from a sender who utters the source message which moves through various stages, to the end as a target text with an audience; it is a view abundantly reflected in most models of the translation process.[2]

I intend to question the automatic applicability of this left-to-right model in actual translational activity in societal contexts from a historical, diachronic perspective with particular reference to the present-day scene.

Senders and translation

In today's world there may be texts which are produced with a structure, style and vocabulary which will facilitate translation.[3] I have never met with such texts, but they might conceivably be found among the scripts of television serials intended for international consumption, among addresses to international audiences, and, perhaps the most likely case, among delegates' speeches at international meetings with conference interpreting. At all events such texts will make up only a fraction of the texts eventually transferred to other cultures. In the vast majority of cases, today as well as in previous ages, authors and original senders have not troubled to facilitate interlingual mediation of their product in the moment of conception; in most cases they have not taken subsequent translation into account at all.

In other words, no matter whether their product is an advertisement or a literary masterpiece, authors normally produce with only an audience speaking their own language in mind. Texts are formed for source language receivers, with their implied background, ideas, notions, and frames of references. In discussing translation in a societal and national context, the point of departure should therefore be the simplest model of communication:

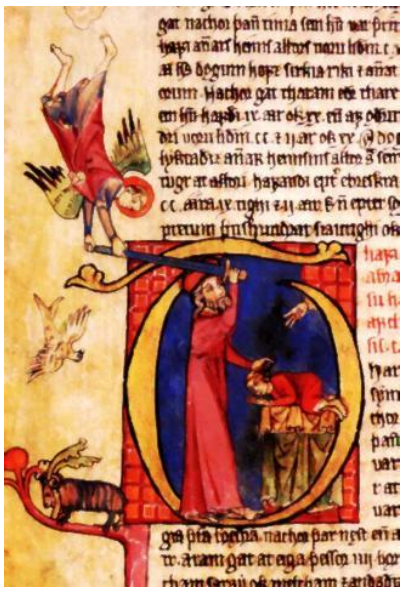
Sender (and sending culture) - message - recipient (and receptor culture)

This model implies that translation is not an integral part of your ordinary source text. Translation is not part of the creation, the existence and the primary reception. Translation is an outside force in relation to the message incorporated in the source text. This approach allows for the legitimacy of the question: "How does translation come about?"

'Imposition' vs. 'requisition' by means of 'cultural bridgeheads'

When translation is forced upon source texts, their realisations in target cultures will vary from being 'imposed' by the source culture (in the broadest sense of the term) to being 'requisitioned', that is wanted, desired, by target cultures. Throughout history and depending on purpose and genre, there have been fluctuations in these respects. 'Imposition' is normally deliberate; it is always driven by the source culture, often with little regard for the receptor culture, and therefore pays much attention to the intention or intentionalities behind the original text manifestation; 'requisition' springs from the target culture and therefore implies a more relaxed attitude (perhaps out of ignorance) towards the sender's intentionality.

The most obvious historical (and present) examples of imposition are found in religious writings.



Icelandic Bible manuscript

Similarly most political and technological texts are normally also translated at the instigation of the sending cultures in order to be imposed on target cultures. Nowadays the main areas of 'imposition' would seem to be international relations, formerly often domination and imperialism; and international trade, specifically sales of products. In these cases sending languages have dominated, and generally speaking, 'initiators' and translators tend to agree that there should be loyalty to the sender. Previously this fidelity was taken to be realised in a literal translation. Even today, and especially until some 20 years ago, one would meet with abysmal translations in advertisements, recipes, manuals and the like which went along with foreign products. Today, there is a much higher awareness among firms that they must bow to the language and culture in foreign

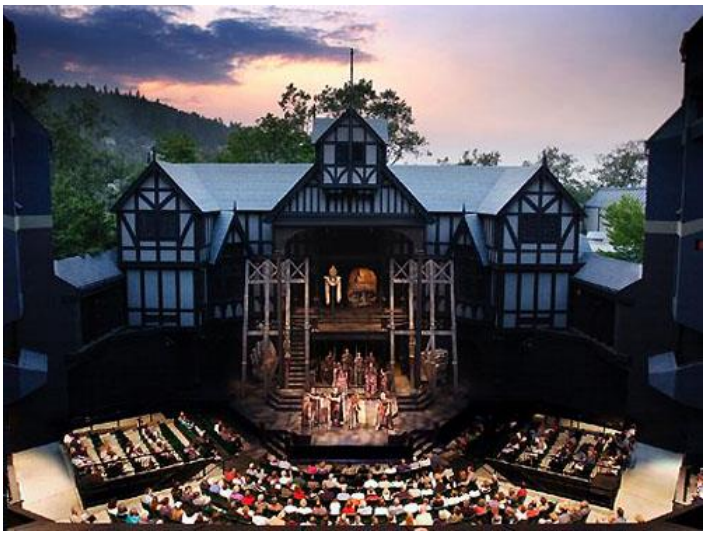
markets if they want to sell their product. Permit me exemplify: In 1975, I collected international sales material from Danish firms, including the world's leading manufacturer of diesel engines for ships. I confidentially received what the firm clearly took to be a fantastic endeavour in advertisement, namely 'exactly the same text' in Spanish, German, French, English and Danish. Since then the shipyard has gone bankrupt - which was, I hasten to add, not the translators' fault. In 1994 I repeated the operation with numerous other firms, and found that by now nearly all target language brochures and manuals were adapted to national purchasers to an extent which made it hard to discuss most target texts in the traditional terms of translation studies. This was striking and also went for technical texts: even when the illustrations were identical, the brochures and specifications would foreground and expand features which were particularly pertinent in the target language nations and suppress information which was irrelevant. In a brochure describing thermostats and the like, the European versions would thus refer to European Union standards, whereas the Russian version referred to performance. The overall lesson is that both 'initiators' and 'translators' (who may well be (even independent) teams of e.g. translators and engineers) are aware that fidelity and loyalty to the sender are best served if the target-language version deviates from the actual phrasing of the source text.

Scientific and educational material is translated mostly as requisition but there is a difference in the fidelity towards the source text: scientific texts will tend to be loyal and literal, whereas educational ones will allow for more latitude and adaptation.

Adaptation will apply, in particular, to literary translation where successful translation is characterised by an overall requisitioning attitude. With the possible exception of educational material, literature differs from the other types of texts in that, at least previously, translations did not come out of the blue. All through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, it was people with some knowledge of the classical languages who would mediate the classics to their contemporaries: prior to translation, these translators were 'cultural bridgeheads' for classical lore in their own cultures who then requisitioned the classics to dress them in new garbs in their own vernaculars.

As vernaculars began to establish their own literatures, the process became more obvious: The sonnet made it into English because Thomas Wyatt was in Italy (1527) and could translate Petrach's work into English. Once back in England, he (and Henry Surrey) paved the way for the genre's English form, rather than for specific translations from Italian.[4]

Throughout subsequent centuries we meet with similar concrete ties between historical facts and translation. Translation between the contemporary languages is undertaken by amateurs with anything ranging from the most superficial to the most thorough command of the source language. Molière's comedies and the French neoclassical theatre, Corneille and Racine, was introduced into England thanks to the 'cultural bridgehead' established among theatre-goers in the British aristocracy and gentry during their exile in France during Cromwell's Republic (1643-1660). In the next century, Shakespeare and the English novel travelled in the opposite direction - to the Continent, notably Germany thanks to the personal union (established in 1714) which tied part of Germany to Great Britain.



The Elizabethan stage in Ashland, Oregon, USA

Large-scale translation: the 19th century

I have suggested that large-scale professional translation, in the sense that many translators could actually turn it into a living, came into existence in the last century as the outcome of the Napoleonic wars, subsequent nationalism, improvements in national infra-structures and the increase in international trade which brought home to the rising bourgeoisie that communication with other nationalities would benefit trade and culture (Dollerup 1996). So they learnt foreign languages, and, more often, consumed translations of foreign literature: there was an ever-increasing need for education and for entertainment.

Moreover, literary translators were still normally paid only token sums for their efforts, so they continued the time-honoured practice of translating as a labour of love. To sending national literatures, however, 'cultural bridgeheads' were a prerequisite for speedy translation. To take one example: the *Tales* of the brothers Grimm were published in Germany in 1812. They were translated into Danish as the first foreign language as early as in 1816. This was the work of Adam Oehlenschläger, the leading Danish romantic poet who himself published in German, as did other Danes at the time (e.g. Jens Baggesen). In Denmark, there were German 'cultural bridgeheads' galore, since one third of the realm was German-speaking (namely Slesvig-Holsten). Conversely, many contemporary Germans knew Danish and constituted Danish 'cultural bridgeheads'. So it was not surprising that Hans Christian Andersen's first serious writing from 1827 was translated as early as 1831, and his novel *The improviser* was published in German the same year it came out in Danish. By 1838 it was claimed that "Sein Name ist in Deutschland so bekannt wie in Dänemark" (Quoted from Möller-Christensen. 1992: 101).

In other cases there were no 'cultural bridgeheads' and no translators who could lift literature directly out of the source language, even if there might be pockets of 'cultural interest' generated by such stimuli as indirect news in potential target cultures. This brings to the fore the function of some languages as 'gateways' to other cultures. There is no doubt that the Grimm *Tales* were destined for an international career when they were

translated into English in 1823, in the same fashion that Hans Christian Andersen's fame in this genre was assured with the 1839 German translation of his first fairytales. 'Gateway languages' in Europe, especially German, English and to some extent French, have always been central to translation, notably so for the propagation of the literature and other messages to and from minor language communities. The increase in the translational activity in the 19th century draws attention to Germany as the 'cultural bridgehead' for British literature, Scott, Byron, Shelley. As gateway language, German provided source texts for minor European languages both in Scandinavia as well as in Central Europe.[5] Conversely, then as now, it is English which is the gateway language for overseas success for much European literature. Although there tends to be a correlation between being a 'gateway' and a 'dominant' language, even minor language communities may sometimes function as gateway languages for literature which was sufficient to draw the attention of 'cultural bridgeheads' or of 'pockets' to their existence: Ibsen and Strindberg both used Danish as their gateway language for getting known in the world at large, first of all in German, which then functioned as the second gateway language for them.

This analytic overview permits us to draw the conclusion that until the 19th century, the requisitioning attitude to literature has mainly been motivated by wishes to present the target language readerships with (a) the classics, (b) literary innovations, and (c) entertainment (or educational material). Much translation work was prompted by idealism in some form or other, be it enthusiasm or religious zeal.

Lord Byron (1788-

New developments

I cut short the chronological overview at this stage because in the late 19th century the mechanisms of translation by requisition were changing. It was not only translators who were becoming professional. So were target language publishers with commercial interests and distribution networks. They began to pay attention to 'pockets of cultural interest' in national cultures that would make translation from a gateway language profitable. Financially, they only had to worry about the translator's fee, for there was no international copyright law protecting authors. With 19th-century improvement in education and the consequent creation of mass readerships, translation of literature - and educational material - became a money-spinning industry, a money-driven activity subject to market forces in capitalist societies. The scene was set for extending the publishers' financial interest in promoting authors when the international Berne convention (1886) protected the original authors' copyright in translation.

The Communist translation policy in the Soviet Union, which began in full in the 1920s, introduced yet another new feature in literary translation: translation was not only requisitioned but also selective and ideologically driven. The Danish literature that made it into Russian was social criticism, exemplified by such writers as Martin Andersen Nexø (1869-1954). Since Russian functioned as the gateway language for other Communist receptor cultures, Nexø's name dominates in the perception of Danish literature in China and, I would assume, other previously Communist countries as well.

The present scene

Jumping to the present Danish scene, there is still imposition. Mainly in terms of export and import in trade; and toleration of poor quality translation in these contexts is high. The reason is not hard to find, for as a consumer one is more motivated to make sense of the opaque instructions than to throw out the newly acquired dishwasher. Imposition is found in religious contexts within denominations and sects. Educational texts seem to be just as much of a mixture as previously. In medicine and the natural sciences, however, English now functions as the lingua franca.

In the field of literature, there are still idealistic translators and publishers who try to boost contemporary authors and thus function as bridgeheads for foreign literature in Denmark, and, to a lesser extent, for Danish or Scandinavian literature abroad, the latter especially with some minor specialist publishers in the US. We also find a wish to present the public with Danish and Nordic 'classics', best exemplified by one or two North American academic presses which operate without subsidies from the source cultures. Press-runs are clearly small and production is mostly for libraries, since the prices are prohibitive for most individual purchasers. It is also interesting that in both cases translations are, more than ever before, direct translations that do not pass over gateway languages. This change indicates either that more emphasis is paid to 'fidelity' or that the translators/publishers assume their audience knows more of the source cultures than others (possibly thanks to previous (and less "loyal") translation by way of gateway languages).

The money-driven market forces are gaining ground, but even so there is ambiguity in the attitude to translation.

Karen Blixen, better known by her pen-name Isaak Dinesen, bypassed translation since she preferred to retell her linguistically complicated and fascinating tales herself in a less convoluted English. In these retellings, she not only omitted lengthy descriptions localising her stories in Denmark, but she also changed numerous details (age and name of characters, dates etc.).[6] The procedure worked well, for she was an international success. Others who have done their own translations or supervised them have fared less well.

Several Danish writers, such as Anders Bodelsen, have made it into Dutch, German, and English in direct translation, and thanks to success in the latter gateway language, into other languages such as Spanish and Italian. Henrik Stangerup has been translated into French. Peter Høeg has been successful in English and a host of other languages with his *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (1994; UK title). Without a major research effort (which is frequently bound to be thwarted because of publishers' trade secrets), it is hard to find out how these authors got to be known to the 'cultural bridgeheads'. In some cases, they have clearly not been requisitioned in the same way as Andersen or Grimm, but sold to (that is 'imposed' on) other countries by the Danish publishers at international conventions, such as the Frankfurt Book Fair. The large-scale institutionalised promotion by publishers of in-house authors is fairly recent but is, as mentioned, ultimately due to the Berne Convention.

There is also a Danish national state-operated, money-driven translation policy for literature which promotes Danish literature abroad by subsidies. The sum is insignificant (c. 200,000 dollars worldwide per year) and it may be used only for publications translated directly from Danish. Given these limitations, its importance is small.

Just for the record: the last twenty-five years or so have also seen the introduction of translation prizes. They are given out internationally by such bodies as Unesco (no Danish winners), the European Commission (no Danish winners), and also by various institutions at the national levels. They are tokens of appreciation, rewards for good work, and occasionally they are mentioned briefly in the newspapers. But I have yet to see the day when such a prize boosts sales substantially.

Discussion

What I have described so far bears some similarity with the situation in the Netherlands as discussed by Ria Vanderauwera (1985), but also considerable dissimilarity. The differences may lie in my having taken a historical bird's eye view and therefore found more success than she. I also think that Danish literature is better off for the simple reason that - despite the official policy - it is not subsidised to any appreciable extent. This means that Danish books are translated, if at all, on their own merits.

Vanderauwera studied English response to Dutch literature. I have not studied foreign response to Danish literature systematically: I noted that Bodelsen was translated into Spanish, because I studied an excerpt and found it distorted. I vividly remember how the criminal's simple action of hiding money in a box became an incomprehensible operation in Spanish, and felt assured that this probably met Spanish expectations about how complicated life is in Denmark. The inaccuracy corresponds with the results I have met in other works, so I believe that most real-life literary translation will always show less fidelity to the original than we accept in translation classes. I even believe that translations from small language cultures will be more inexact than translations from major languages into minor language cultures. But to return to the question of success: I have noticed cursorily in my newspaper that Stangerup met with French critical acclaim, and that Peter Høeg was on the bestseller list in the US for a couple of months. On the other hand, I have studied Danish critical response to foreign literature systematically, and my findings are that, as a result of some incisive debate, critics have finally come round to taking translation sufficiently seriously to assess the 'quality', which is normally one or two sentences on the felicity of the style. They are clearly not bothered with undertaking a detailed collation with the original.

But otherwise, what are the paradigmatic lessons of this discussion?

First and foremost it is obvious that the models of translation discussed at the beginning do serve to illustrate the process of translation as communication at some level or other. But they must not blind us to the fact that the vast majority of texts are not propelled into translation the moment they are created and produced. They are translated because of forces which are external to the text, and they are translated in an interplay between the target culture and the source message which I have here termed 'imposition' and

'requisition'. To illustrate this, the communication model must be modfied as follows:

Sender (sending culture) - message >> << translator>> <<recipient (receptor culture).

The arrows indicate the degree of intense interplay in the process of cultural transfer in translation.

In a larger perspective, I believe that imposition will continue to exist as long as there is (a) power and superiority, and (b) tangible objects for discussion. Democracy and the desire for profit may make for adaptation to target languages, but not total severance from source texts.

As far as literature is concerned, ideologically-driven translation is unlikely to survive into the next century, for the simple reason that computer networks will bypass censorship. From a narrow-minded perspective, one can make a case that the European Union subsidised translation - whose importance is negligible anyway - is ideologically-driven, but since the motive is to further the minor languages in the name of linguistic and cultural equality, the motive is far different from that of the Soviet state.

Conversely, I do believe that, although there will always be room for idealism, translation will become an increasingly money-driven activity due to market forces where publishers will have a much greater say than authors and translators. The publishers' professional insight into the advertisement channels, command of the distribution networks and their intimate knowledge of the potential audiences, will enable them to monopolise the market.

Compared to the world at large, Denmark (and for that matter the rest of Scandinavia) may be a special case since we have been around for more than a thousand years and our polar bears in the streets make us sufficiently exotic for others occasionally to requisition our literatures.

This is not the case with newly emerging nations which, I pointed out, have a legitimate wish to have their national cultures recognised. Is there a lesson in this study? I think so: It is impossible to beat the market forces with subsidies and any number of prizes for translators. A few authors make their own translations, and are thus their own 'bridgeheads'. Mention has already been made of Adam Oehlenschläger and Karen Blixen in Danish letters. For others, national publishers may establish professional money-driven contacts with foreign publishers at book fairs, and, as we have (presumably) seen with Bodelsen and Høeg, the procedure may be successful. In principle there is a third option: in so far as the cost and effort are accepted by the political powers that be, it should hypothetically be possible to avoid the inbuilt target-language directionality we find in normal 'cultural bridgeheads' by having subsidised translators and teams of professionals to translate and revise translations of national classics.[7] Even so, this procedure is fraught with dangers spanning from infelicitous phrasings immediately seized upon by reviewers as "bad translationese", to distribution problems in the target nations. In other words, whether we like it or not, the 'cultural bridgeheads' always constitute by far the most efficient avenue for the exportation of national literatures.

Perhaps it is possible to further the process by introducing national masterpieces - in the form of subsidised classics in gateway language versions, notably English - in translation by non-native speakers and hope for the best, that is, for 'cultural bridgeheads'

in other cultures to take note of them, but I know of no successful example.

In my view, if national literatures are to become international, this must take place according to a natural process: nations have to cultivate their 'cultural bridgeheads', especially those in gateway languages and abide the time until they voluntarily start requisitioning literature. I am not saying the result is perfect in terms of fidelity, once a work of literature has been over a couple of 'gateway languages', but it is the price which minor language societies have to pay for getting themselves heard. Hopefully, some traces of the original work will still be there - witness the brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen.

Notes

1. My attention was drawn to these features in connection with some research (e.g. Dollerup 1995) as well as to the frequent patriotic query which I have met with: "Is it only because of poor translations that our most prominent poet/author has not received the Nobel Prize."

2. See e.g. Wills, W. *The Science of Translation*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr. 1982. p. 57 & 81. Ji_í Levý. 1969. *Die literarische Übersetzung: Theorie einer Kunstgattung*. Frankfurt: Athenäum, p. 33. Nida implies this sequentiality in his diagram of the transfer or translation in *Toward a Science of Translation*. Leiden: Brill. 1964 (p. 146). That the models are not exclusively European is demonstrated in N. Mohanty (India) in "Translation: an integration of cultures." *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology 2*. 1994: 194; and in M. Uwajeh (Nigeria) in "The case for a performative translatology." (same issue, p. 247).

3. Even if this should be the case, such facilitation can only be undertaken with language-specific translation in mind: i. e. no source text can possibly take into account translation problems and language pecularities which apply to all other languages in the world.

4. In this context I shall leave out a detailed discussion of the implication that this mechanism makes it ontologically impossible to talk about equivalence, no matter whether of form, content, or effect, between source and target language reception: 'equivalence' is, at best, a comparable entity between the response of a target language audience which can read the original source text, and the response of the target language audience which does not know the source language and therefore needs translation. This last incisive observation is due to Jens Nørmark Lind and Peter Sestoft (essay, Spanish, University of Copenhagen 1992).

5. For Scandinavia and Denmark in particular, I refer to the list in Nielsen (1966: 11-12; and 1976, various places). For Central Europe to Hans Vermeer (private information).

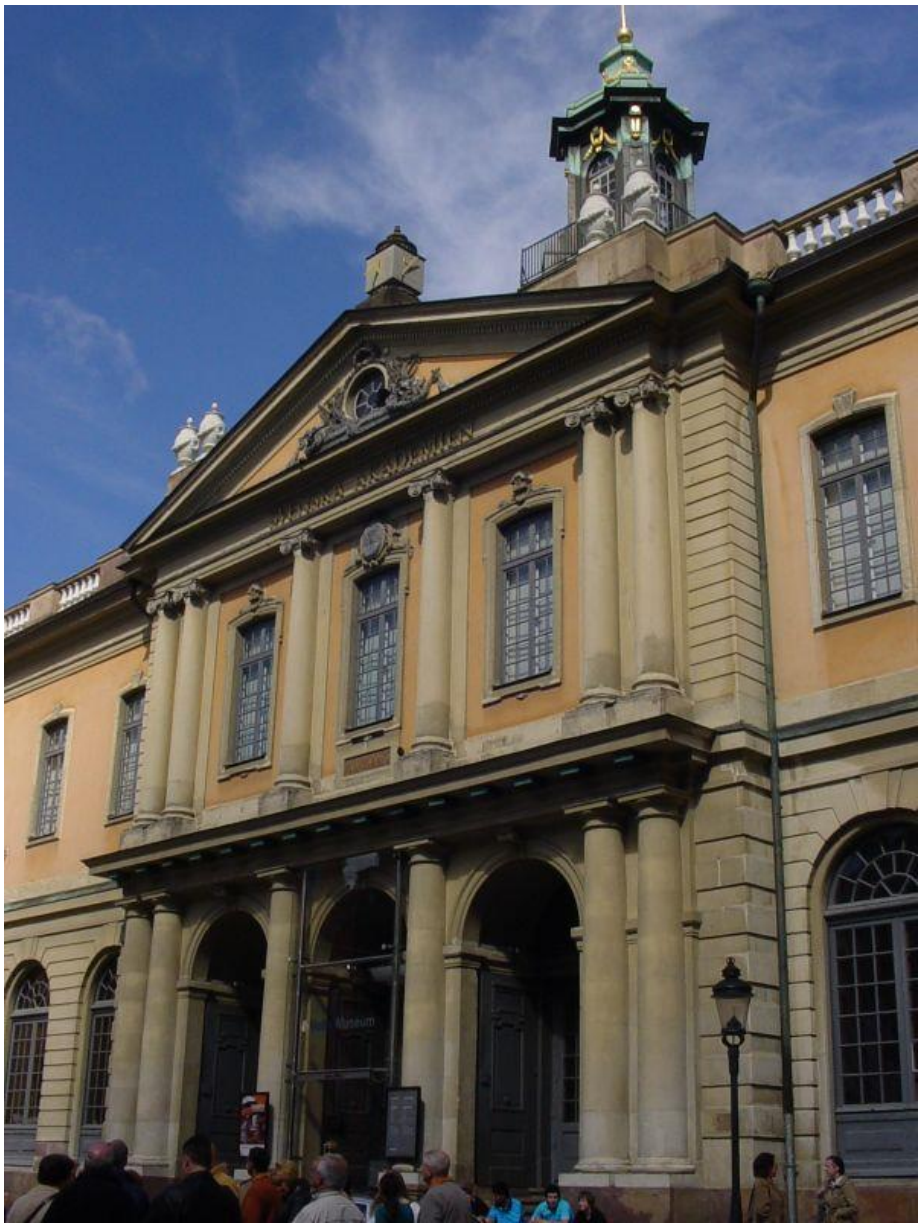
6. Received opinion has it that Karen Blixen first did her work in English and then retold it

in Danish. However, the types of linguistic and content divergencies in her works show that this is highly unlikely, and that it must be the other way round in the vast majority of cases. These linguistic divergencies have been touched upon in Dollerup et al (1990: 273-274) but cannot be studied with a view to publication before Karen Blixen's copyright expires (in 2012) because different agencies hold the Danish and US copyrights to her works. Many nations actually boast of writers who do their own translations, e.g. Samuel Becket (French into English). A study of their procedures would provide us with supplementary information on the issue at hand.

7. In principle there are various ways of doing it. The main point is that most countries, including large ones, do subsidise translations of literature into foreign languages. This goes for The People's Republic of China (Its subsidised journal is available from embassies [private information from Eva Hung]). Slovenia (private information from Meta Grosman). The Netherlands (Vanderauwera). I am sure readers can supplement this list.

RERERENCES

Dollerup, Cay & Iven Reventlow & Carsten Rosenberg Hansen. 1990. "Reader, text, translation and interpretative potentials." *Multilingua* 9, 271-284.
Dollerup, Cay. "Translation as a creative force in literature: the birth of the European Bourgeois Fairy-Tale". *The Modern Language Review* 90 (1995), 94-102.
Dollerup, Cay. 1996. "The emergence of the teaching of translation." In: Dollerup, Cay (Ed). *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 3. New Horizons.* Forthcoming. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
Möller-Christensen, Ivy York. 1992. *Den gyldne trekant: H.C. Andersens gennembrud i Tyskland 1831-1850 med tilhørende bibliografi*. Odense: Odense University Press.
Nielsen, Jørgen Erik. 1966. *Den engelske litteraturs dyrkere i Holsten omkring 1820*. København: Gad.
Nielsen, Jørgen Erik. 1976. *Den samtidige engelske litteratur og Danmark 1800-1840.* Copenhagen: Nova.
Vanderauwera, Ria. 1985. "The response to translated literature: a sad example." In: Hermans, Theo (ed.). *The Manipulation of Literature*. London: Croom Helm.



The main building of the Swedish Academy, Stockholm, Sweden. It awards the Nobel prizes