An escalator in the Moscow Underground,

'RELAY' AND 'SUPPORT' TRANSLATIONS

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Abstract

This article focuses on the fact that much translation is not made directly between the source language of the original and the target language in hand, but may have passed intermediary third (fourth etc.) languages. It is argued that, since most intermediary realisations have been made for actual audiences, it would be more precise to term such realisations 'relays' for other target texts, and reserve the term 'indirect translation' for cases where there are no genuine consumers of intermediate realisations. The article further points out that translators sometimes consult translations into other languages than their own target language, thus using what could be described as 'support translation'. All these procedures problematise the issue of 'original' and 'translation'.

This article discusses the complex state of affairs that lies behind what is often cursorily referred to as 'indirect translation', 'pivot interpreting' and the like.[i] A thorough examination of this phenomenon reveals a number of different transfer procedures. Opening with a brief discussion of a model presenting translation as an extended version of intralingual communication, the article examines intermediary realisations of translations in the relationship between 'original' and 'end product'. There are significant differences between situational contexts in which such intermediary realisations are subsumed to communication between senders and end-users, and those cases in which intermediary realisations are primarily intended for consumption in the language which later serves as the source language for subsequent translation(s). The term 'relay' is suggested for the latter type. It is then exemplified in conference interpreting and (literary) translation. Yet other types of transfer strategies are found in 'support translation', which involves consultation of translations into other languages than that of the actual target text. Finally, the article briefly discusses the 'multilingual original'.

… //18 …

Translation as communication

It is often argued that since translation is a type of communication, a model of communication is a useful basis for discussion. In such a model, interlingual transfers are characterised by the existence of a medium of translation (a translator, an interpreter, a subtitler, or, for that matter, a machine). Consequently the communicational chain looks like this:

Sender > message > (near)simultaneous reception/mediation/sending > message > receiver.

Discussions focus on the relationship between the source-text 'original' and the target-language version. The terms employed about this relationship describe a reality in which, even when there are intermediary realisations, the focus is on the relationship between the original sender and the end consumer:

'Original sender' > message > intermediary decoding and near(simultaneous) encoding by transmitter > message > decoding by end receiver.

'Indirect' translation and other types

However, much interpreting, subtitling, and translation is not based on the text of the 'original' in the source language, but on realisations of the 'original' in yet other

languages.

An interest confined exclusively to the relationship between the original sender and the end consumer may occasionally be justified, provided the aim of the communication is to convey the exact meaning between only two parties, two 'end interlocutors'. This was the case in a Danish murder trial, where a Thai witness made a deposition in court as follows:

The woman's deposition reached the jury in circuitous ways, since it was first rendered from Thai into English by one interpreter and then into Danish by yet another interpreter. (*Politiken*. 12 September 1998. 1:4, cc. 5-6. My translation).

In principle, the translation procedure goes via the following stages:
1. New speech
2. Intermediary, ephemeral rendition (no consumers in this target language)
3. End which reaches the audience intended and may lead to response, that is another new speech (= 1, 2, 3, etc.))
… // 19 …

One imagines that this scenario, in which intermediary realisations are merely a means for establishing communication between only two parties, is rare. It would, presumably, be confined to liaison interpreting or - as in the above case - court interpreting where there are well-defined roles for the two parties at each end of the chain of communication (namely, on the one hand, the judiciary establishment comprising the jury, the judge, as well as the counsels for the defence and prosecution, and, on the other hand, the witnesses and the defendant(s).

In many types of interlingual transfer there may be translations into several languages, one after the other. In these cases, a terminology which implies that these realisations are of secondary importance, as does 'indirect translation' with its explicit focus on the end realisation, is misleading. This terminology does not really allow for the fact that the vast majority of translational realisations of an original into any language, are primarily intended for an audience. The term 'indirect translation' should be reserved for cases like the court proceedings cited, for situations where two parties must communicate by means of a third intermediary realisation which has no legitimate audience.

Relay

In order to focus sharply on the implications of these intermediary, 'non-original' realisations, I suggest we introduce 'relay', a term which is well-established in interpreting, but the relevance of which seems to have been largely overlooked in Translation Studies. Even in interpreting 'relay' is viewed mostly in relation to the 'final' users.[ii]

Within such a framework, 'relay' can be defined as a mediation from source to target language in which the translational product has been realised in another language than that of the original; the defining feature is that the intermediary translation has an audience,

that is consumers, of its own. Unlike the renditions rightfully termed 'indirect' above, these intermediary realisations do not exist in a vacuum or in an ephemeral interval between the original and the target language version under discussion.

Roughly speaking the chain of communication is as follows:

A. Source text -> audience + translator ->
B. Translation (1) -> audience + translator ->
C. Translation (2) -> audience + translator ->
D. Translation (3) -> audience + translator, etc.

Relay often also involves a delay in the arrival of the message in interlingual transmission as opposed to an instantaneous - but not necessarily simultaneous - rendition. …// 20 … Accordingly, it was no coincidence that the use of relay in interpreting became obvious to non-professional outsiders when Danish became an international language: relay is most apparent in language transfers involving minor languages, and is most visible to public audiences in simultaneous conference interpreting.[iii]

Conference interpreting

The Common Market (now the European Union) had four official languages, namely Dutch, French, German, and Italian when originally founded. The entry of the UK, Ireland, and Denmark in 1973, added two more languages, namely English, covering both Ireland and the UK, and Danish.[iv] At the European institutions, it is (in principle) the prerogative of national delegates to speak their own language. Danish members of the European Parliament exercised this right, and also listened to Danish interpreters. Other nationalities noted that Danes were slow on the uptake, indeed dimwitted. Clever journalists then noticed that there seemed to be degrees of dim-wittedness among the members of parliament: if, for instance, a Dutch delegate cracked a joke, the Dutch would laugh; after 5-10 seconds, the French and Germans would get the point; after some more seconds, the English, the Irish, and the Italians would catch on, and, then, finally, the Danes would join in the general merriment.[v]

The figure of 5-10 seconds is traditionally cited in research on simultaneous interpreting as the 'time lag' between the original sender's utterance and the interpreter's rendition. This is the explanation for the ripple response described above:

- The Dutch speaker is understood by his countrymen, who laugh right away.
- The German and the French interpreters render the joke in German and French, respectively. Consequently, after 5-10 seconds, the German and the French listeners appreciate the joke.
- The English and the Italian interpreters do not know Dutch, so, understanding German and French, they use these languages as their source texts and their delegates laugh after 10-20 seconds. In this example, the Danish interpreters use English as their source-text: 'dim-wittedness' is due to relay in which all listeners use interpreted renditions.

Bureaucrats, politicians, and interpreters who have lost touch with the profession argue that relay leads to confusion, since there must be numerous errors in every transfer from any one language into another. Working interpreters tend to agree with my views which are based on fairly systematic listening to relays: indisputable errors may arise, but there are few.[vi]

It is true that, there are errors in the *product* of relay: however, these have rarely anything to do with the phenomenon of relay, but are due to the first interpreter's misunderstanding of the original sender. ….// 21 … Normally, these errors are caused by the original speakers: delegates mumble, hit the microphone, turn their heads, speak dialect, use slang, quote figures in incomprehensible ways, and, without warning, use prepared manuscripts, thus shifting delivery into a written mode without informing anybody, least of all the interpreters (for an interpreter's views on such occurrences, see Pearl (1995)).

Similarly, the *use* of relay may lead to errors in the product. Let us assume that Danish speeches are relayed by way of Dutch to English and German, from these languages to French and Italian, and so on. This gives a time lag of some 30 seconds before the Danish speech reaches to Portuguese. Let us then assume - and it is a fair assumption - that the chair of the meeting understands Dutch. When the Dutch interpreter concludes the brilliant summing-up of the last Danish speech, the chair logically assumes that this is the end and gives the floor to the next delegate, say, a Greek. The Greek delegate opens with a rousing statement. Here is the snag: the Greek 'original' begins before the entire 'original' (Danish) message has made it through all relays; at the same time, the interpreters have to reorganise their chains of relay. This sometimes forces the interpreters either to cut short the previous speech, or omit the beginning of the new speech. The delegates notice that something has gone wrong and assume it to be the interpreters' fault. We see that it is not due to relay as such, but to the management of relay: it is the fault of the chair.

Overall, then, at the institutions where relay is most often seen by the public (the European institutions, the UN), the process of relay does not lead to many misunderstandings *at the linguistic level*, for the interpreters are professionals who are trained to deliver well-phrased and easily understood produce.

On the other hand, relay interpreting is undoubtedly a risky undertaking when there are no professional middlemen around: in my experience, it usually means that communication takes place by means of sign language and gestures.

Translation

The above discussion is based on present-day simultaneous conference interpreting, but the implications extend back in time as well as to other types of linguistic transfer.

Relay and concomitant delay are widespread in translation, indeed so common that, in literary studies, for instance, it is hardly noted at all. We do not consider it strange that literature takes time to cross cultural barriers. We accept that Shakespeare was not translated into Spanish until the 18th century.

Sometimes the original no longer exits. The Jesus of the New Testament must have spoken Aramaic, but no Aramaic text has been preserved. Modern Bibles are made from relay editions using different languages. The English Bible overseen by John Wyclif (c. 1385) used the Latin *Vulgate* as its source text. The *Vulgate* derived from St. Jerome's Bible (c. 400), itself a Latin translation of Greek sources which St. Jerome subsequently revised by means of Hebrew texts. William Tyndale's English Bible of 1526 was based on Greek texts. Knowing no Greek, Miles Coverdale (1535) used Tyndale's version of the New Testament and translated the Old Testament from Hebrew and from Martin Luther's Bible, thus also involving German.[vii] …// 22 … The main point is that some 'original' source texts of the Bible no longer exist, so that translations are based on relay translations in languages where, like the renditions of present-day conference interpreters, they have had audiences of their own: in Greek, in Latin, and in German.

Today, most translation activity is concerned with texts that are not intended to last for generations, but are accepted as transitory and short-lived, such as letters, instructions, manuals, used in industry, in trade, and in tourism. In these contexts, translation is carried out soon after the appearance of the original, if at all: there is no point in translating old manuals, instructions for obsolete tools, out-of-date tourist brochures. Most translation in the modern world is therefore comparable to consecutive interpreting: once the message is complete in the source language, it is followed by a translation. In principle, it is immaterial whether an interval of five minutes or one year elapses, for the point is that we are not talking about a century or more between the appearance of the original and its translation(s).

Literature, however, offers many examples of relay in which the original is still extant and where translation is both relayed and delayed.

Shakespeare did not reach the European continent until the 18th century, when he was promoted in France by Voltaire and Abbé Prévost. Subsequently, French translations served as source texts for early Spanish renditions from the first *Hamleto* (1772) until 1838 when *Macbeth* was translated directly from English.

The *Tales* of the brothers Grimm were initially published in 1812-1815 in German. In 1823 an English translation by Edgar Taylor of selected tales achieved success among English audiences. This collection - and its successors in English - also provided source texts, relays, for numerous translations into other languages.[viii] Similarly German translations of fairytales first published by the Dane Hans Christian Andersen in 1835, were made for German audiences as early as 1837 and enjoyed great success. Such German texts served as the source texts for the first translations of Andersen into English and later into central and southern European languages, for instance, Slovene.[ix] In subsequent periods direct translations from Danish into English served as source texts for yet other target translations into, for instance, Chinese (see e.g. Xu 1998).

I have a reason for singling out tales: they are popular and hence often published. Accordingly, they offer a picture in miniature of relay, nowadays especially so in European, indeed international, co-prints. In co-printing a publisher in one country produces a book with illustrations and uses translations from national publishers which fit these illustrations in terms of typography, that is, of length. The point to note is that the

text provided by the 'original' publisher may already be a translation and thus a relay of the 'original'. This procedure is used extensively in the publication and translation of children's literature and of illustrated textbooks. It is - to the best of my knowledge - largely overlooked in comparative philological translation studies.

Further aspects of relay

The term 'relay' highlights the dynamics in the interlingual movements of translation. … //23 … The end product of translation is static, but this static translation may be used for other dynamic translation or interpreting processes, leading to yet other static translations.[x] There is, in principle, no finality to this process: translations of the same text can continue indefinitely, not only within the same binary language pair, but also between languages and cultures. This is why 'relay' is a better term than 'indirect translation', which implies not only that intermediary realisations are ephemeral, but also that the translation in hand is the only end product imaginable.

Elitist literature and direct translation

There are more points to make in terms of relay. Elitist literary texts are nowadays frequently translated directly from the source-language into the target language: it is rare for Shakespeare not to be translated directly from English; most *Complete Collections* of the brothers Grimm are translated directly from German; and Hans Christian Andersen has been translated directly into Chinese (by Lin Hua: 1995) and Slovene (by Silvana Orel: 1998). Perhaps we may formulate a rule which applies to both elitist literary and to Bible translations world-wide: that *as time goes by, target translations tend to get 'closer' to the original language*.

It is more difficult to tell whether this also applies to other translation - such as that made for industry and trade. Presumably there is more direct translation from Italian into Danish (for, for instance, Fiat cars) - whereas I would guess that most Japanese instructions and manuals would be relayed via English or (South-American) Spanish to minor European languages.

Relay and deviations

It is, furthermore, a fact of life that literary translation is not highly remunerated, and that translators commit errors, ranging from mistakes involving 'false friends' to complete distortions. In books by esteemed Danish translators I find at least one error (by my definition) per page of prose translation, and, inevitably, more in popular literature where translators and publishers take little care. Of course, most readers, including reviewers, do not notice deviations because they do not collate the books they read for fun with the

originals, indeed there is no reason why they should read a translation at all if they are well versed in the language of the original.

No matter how we define 'errors' or deviations, it is clear that in written public translations, each translator using relay will normally add new 'deviations' to those made by predecessors in the chain. In relation to the original, there is thus a cumulation of deviations every time a work is relayed. In this respect, then, public written translation differs radically from public professional simultaneous conference interpreting, for thanks to the professionalism involved in delivery in relay interpreting, nearly all errors occur between the original speaker and the first interpreter and not in the chain of relay. Conversely, relay is indeed a major source of deviations in written translation.[xi]

Cultural differences account for some 'deviations'. Others are explicable in terms of the presence or absence of the sender: in conference interpreting, the presence of both senders and receivers in the same room, the body language of senders, audiences, and other contextual features constitute strong corrective elements.[xii] In literary translation, relay translation (as well as delay) implies that the sender, the original author, recedes into the background. The communicational chain is not complete. Fidelity and loyalty to the author become weakened, not out of ill will, but for practical reasons - the translator will not always be in a position to have the author elucidate obscure points. In other words, the use of relay in translation shows that models of the translation process which operate by means of unbroken chains from the original sender to the final receiver are inapplicable to the realities of translation work.

'Support translation'

Relay translation should be distinguished from what I call 'support translation', my term for the strategy in which, translating a given source text, translators check translations into languages other than their own target language in order to see whether colleagues have found satisfactory solutions to certain problems - usually only to find that it is the same passages which prove problematic to translators in related languages.[xiii] …// 24 …This strategy *per se* is rarely mentioned in scholarly Translation Studies, possibly because, in literary translation, there may be problems of *droit moral*.[xiv] Historical examples, such as Coverdale's Bible exist. At the European Commission, translators are grouped according to topics, not to languages, and in some of these groups it logically follows that 'other translations' are used as 'supports'.

It will be appreciated that the relation between 'support' and 'relay' is connected with the degree of dependence on other realisations: in pure 'relay', the translator uses the totality of another translator's text, whereas in regular cases of 'support translation' we meet isolated fragments within these wholes. However, there is obviously an enormous area in between and one which contains all sorts of fascinating combinations. The German dramatist Bertold Brecht's translation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is a case in point: "he used two editions in English as well as a modern [German] edition of Dorothea Tieck's translation, and the prompt book from [a German 1936 staging] as well as [the Latin

historians] Livy and Plutarch." (Ewbank 1995: 8).

The multilingual original

Finally, there is that interesting phenomenon: the multilingual original. Many European Union documents can hardly be said to have a stable 'core' original, unambiguously placed in the context of one language only (Dollerup 1996). Kristine Anderson (1997) discusses the dialectics in certain works by the Danish author Isaac Dinesen who sometimes writes alternatively in Danish and in English, producing startlingly different versions of works considered the 'same' by her publishers and audiences. Xu Yanhong (1998) calls attention to English versions which come into existence at the same time as the Danish originals.

Concluding remarks

On the one hand, there are legitimate, even 'durable' realisations made for consumers in target languages; in dynamic processes, such translations may be used for other translations in chains which are, in principle, infinite; these I suggest we term relay translations in order to stress the multiplicity of audiences. On the other hand, we find rare cases where ephemeral realisations in intermediary languages exist only as subordinate prerequisites for establishing one clear chain of communication between two (parties of) interlocutors. It is only in these last cases that we can truly speak of 'indirect translation'.

In actual translation work, there are more dimensions to be taken into account: the presence and availability of the senders and receivers, the time gap, the deviations introduced by translators, by accident or design for any motive ranging // …25 // from ignorance via censorship to deliberate exclusion in order to produce better integration into target cultures.

The situation discussed above is, it is true, complex, and my terminology at the secondary level is open to debate. Nevertheless, this article serves to underline the point that in order to deal with these facets in the real world, terms used in Translation Studies should try to describe the facts as precisely as possible. This is all the more pertinent as the terms discussed also shed additional light on the vexed relation between the 'authority of the original' and the realisations commonly called 'translations'.[xv]

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Endnotes

i. The terminology used in interpreting is cited in several entries in Shuttleworth and Cowie (e.g. 'indirect translation', 'relay interpreting'). It appears in connection with (literary) Translation Studies in, for instance, Toury (1995). Toury calls attention to the importance of intermediary realisations by arguing that these realisations are affected by

the norms of the intermediary culture (1995: 129-146).

ii. The entries (by way of the index 'relay') in Snell-Hornby (1998) and Shuttleworth (1997) are typical.

iii. My knowledge of the working of the interpreting and translation services is based on interviews and visits to (mostly) the European Commission. For further information, see Dollerup (1996).

iv. The history of the interpreting services at the European institutions remains to be written. However, an informal (and intriguing) lecture delivered by one seasoned interpreter (Dollerup and Ceelen 1995: 40) suggests that, prior to Danish entry, delegates with the two 'minor' languages (namely Dutch and Italian) as their mother tongues would rarely have interpreters.

v. The dim-wittedness was noted in *Punch* by a political columnist ('Grundy') who was not aware of the causes (c. 1975). At that time I had spent a total of three months at the EU institutions and could diagnose the reasons. My observations have since then been confirmed by insiders. One reason why Danish response was delayed in the European Parliament was that at that time the European institutions employed Danish free-lance interpreters who could interpret only between English and Danish; this is no more the case.

vi. There are additional reasons for errors being relatively few. One is that at public institutions, speakers and seasoned interpreters are familiar with a special in-house language ('Eurocratese'). Furthermore, if one interpreter's delivery is inferior, interpreters who employ relay will use another colleague as their 'pivot'. In relay, potential sources of error can thus be controlled and, if necessary, bypassed (Dollerup 1987: 177-179).

vii. The story of Bible translations is set out in Delisle and Woodsworth (1995), but some of the details in the present article are drawn from encyclopedias.

viii. English translations of the *Tales* are discussed by Sutton (1996); the Danish translations of the *Tales* and the internationalisation of Andersen and Grimm are discussed in Dollerup (1999: e.g. 279-285).

ix. Hans Vermeer and Silvana Orel (private information).

x. This point is elaborated in Dollerup 1988.

xi. The term 'public' is here used to denote the fact that, unlike professional, technical translation, literary translation and simultaneous conference interpreting (especially in political contexts) are accessible to 'the public'.

xii. As mentioned above (fn 1), Toury 1995 discusses these in terms of norms imposed by the intermediary culture. Gottlieb discusses the cumulation of errors in relay subtitling (1997: 127-129).

xiii. It goes without saying that this practice is found mostly in closely related languages and in societies where translators usually work from B, C, and possibly D languages. Since the phenomenon caught my eye, I have routinely asked Danish (literary) translators whether they have ever used it. Many have, but virtually all seem to have found it impractical. At a conference held in Hungary in 1995, a professional translator who

rendered EU documents into Swedish-Finnish told me that his team had searched Danish EU translations for good solutions to linguistic problems but in vain.

xiv. It must be stressed that 'support translation' is *not* identical with re-use of phrasing from a previous translation in the same language, a practice often mentioned in Translation Studies and translation practice (in literature, e.g. Levý 1969: 79-82; or, in machine-aided translation: 'fuzzy matching').

xv. I wish to thank Ms Xu Yanhong for illuminating discussions which clarified our respective thinking about 'support translation' and 'versions'. Xu Yanhong discusses concrete examples and 'routes' for transfers from Danish originals to Chinese realisations (Xu 1998).

A roadside tree (Romania)