The walls around Kremlin, Moscow, Russia.

THE GLOBALISATION OF TRANSLATION

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Introduction

Translation is by nature international, but this article will address mostly the remarkable changes that have occurred in the fields of practical translation,

theoretical Translation Studies, and the interplay between theory and practice with special emphasis on the sea-changes since 1990. The article starts with an overview of the development of translation from the earliest time.

Interpreting must be the oldest form of translation, since it has existed ever since the first contacts between humans speaking different languages. **Written translation** presupposes no less than three literate people, namely the original writer, a translator, and a reader in the target language. It therefore presupposes two civilizations with fairly sophisticated educational systems as well as systems of writing. Therefore, it has until quite recently been dominated by the elite. It has been used for treaties, agreements, and dictates. The kind of translation activity which is best documented and therefore most heatedly debated is that of elitist documents, such as literature and, most importantly, religion. It is quite thought-provoking that two of the world's largest religions are based on translation: Buddhist sutras were originally written in Sanskrit and were translated into Chinese (from c AD 150 to c AD 1100), and Christianity is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ who spoke Aramaic. The Aramaic 'original(s)' of the New Testament are not extant, but have been interpreted and translated from c AD 50 to the present day from Latin, Greek and Hebrew – and even English versions.

The overview and its historical setting

In order to place this article in a proper perspective, I believe a brief outline of the history of translation is in place. European thinking is still dominant in the field of Translation Studies so the history of translation is primarily related to European history and to written translation. … //272 …

The first period is from the earliest translations until c. 1540

In terms of thinking, this period was dominated by translation of religious text and the ensuing debates. Latin was the dominant source language and most translation was of scriptures and classical works into vernacular languages. Translation was mostly undertaken by clerics and the style was characterized by a considerable fidelity to the letter of the text.

Lutheranism was the major force behind the bible translation in national vernaculars, which were usually made by teams of translators whose work would then be the authorized version of the national church.

The second period is from c. 1540 to 1790

The increasing importance of the venacular languages led to the emergence of national literatures. Although the translations of the classics continued, there was also literary translation between the vernaculars.

New genres were created. The English sonnet, for example, was created by means of translations of Italian sonnets in the 16th century. In the 18th, the English novel made it to Germany because the Kingdom of Hanover was part of Great Britain, and from there it was transferred to other countries.

Translation in this epoch was pronouncedly free. This was hardly because of a deliberate translation strategy, but rather due to the fact that translators were simply not well versed in the foreign languages. Even if they were, the likelihood that anybody would check on fidelity was small. Copyright barely existed and adaptation was frequently used to accommodate local tastes.

There was some semiprofessional translation. Some states began to have employees whose primary work was to translate or interpret in trade, in customs work, and in the precursors of today's foreign ministries.

From the French Revolution to the Second World War: 1790-1945

The eighteenth century saw the slow emergence of the middle classes who came to constitute the bourgeoisie in Europe. The young men became more educated and, in so far as foreign languages were concerned, both the aristocracy and the middle classes focused on learning French all over Europe.

The French Revolution ultimately brought about the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon's troops moved at an incredible pace and conquered most of Europe. The reason is usually overlooked by historians, but in that epoch, before the nation states, Napoleon could count on willing interpreters wherever he went. …//273 … His troops were welcomed by young men willing to speak French and helping the troops getting provisions.

After the war, these young men settled down, perhaps in some traditional line. For those who had the talent, the new field of translation became a profession. These translators varied in competence. Also, the evaluation of what constituted adequate competence varied from country to country. Some countries introduced official examinations (certificates, authorizations) for translators to guarantee the quality of translations. These certifications represented a key concept in translation work: it is always undertaken because there is a societal or cultural need for it.

Standards in translation improved in the course of the 19th century. Improved educational systems reduced illiteracy and swelled the ranks of those who knew a foreign language, often the lingua franca in their region. In the United Kingdom, that language was English; in Northern Europe, German; and in Southern and Eastern Europe, French. Latin was no longer the dominant source language. Relay translation in which a translation into one language serves as the source text for a new translation into a third language was found on a large scale. Shakespeare made it to Romanian from German and French translations. The English translations from German of the brothers Grimm's *German Tales* served for Japanese and from there to Chinese translations.

In terms of approaches to the text, technology, and the natural sciences demanded exactness, a literal translation. Romanticism had strengthened the notion of the uniqueness of the original and therefore that, in principle, a translation was merely a pale reflection, inferior to the real thing.

Europe 1945–1970: international co-operation

World War I was conducted by national armies under national generals. After the war, the League of Nations was a Francophone organization because it was a diplomatic body. Then, in 1940 the Red Army set up a course for military linguists and schools for training translators and interpreters were founded in Geneva in 1941 and 1943 in Vienna. Translation was established as an activity in its own right, distinct from foreign language acquisition which is a crucial watershed transition for the discipline.

Due to the quick French defeat and the massive U.S. intervention, there were fewer languages of command during World War II. This war was fought between armies dominated by Russian and English on the Allied side, and German and Japanese on the other side. … //274 …

The period following World War II was politically dominated by the Cold War. The military and scientific competition between East and West led to attempts to make translation by machines so as to avoid human labour and fallibility – but with little success.

There was international co-operation at various levels that called for linguistic mediation. Professionals trained in schools began to gain prominence.

A number of international organizations employed translators and inter-preters. They introduced teamwork to an unprecedented degree at the same time that these language professionals gained visibility and status. New schools were founded and new languages taught.

The European nations gave up their former colonies, thus creating new nations that began to develop their own identities and understand and cope with their linguistic complexities.

1970-1990

By 1970 the third generation of translators who had received formal training entered the ranks. In the United Nations, Arabic became the sixth offi-cial language, and the precursor of the present-day European Union got the same number of official languages in 1973 when Denmark, the United King-dom and Ireland became members of the club. The European Union institutions became obvious employers for translators and interpreters in Europe. Team-work became even more widespread and began to be found in translation agen-cies.

Translation Studies emerged as a discipline in the academic world. Alt-hough it was still dominated by ideas of equivalence and linguistics, the disci-pline gradually came to view the translator as an active participant in the act of translation.

This change was particularly obvious in Germany, where most trans-lators still translate into their B- and C-languages. There were not enough trans-lators working out of German in other countries to keep up with the growing need for translation that was to be used for the export of German products. Ger-man translators therefore needed to be aware of cultural differences between German and other languages' ways of expressing things.

Most important was the emergence of fora devoted to discussing trans-lation and the increased visibility of organizations such as the International Fed-eration of Translators and conferences for scholars of translation. … // 275 …

After 1990

Around 1990, the Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Newly independent states in Europe and in the former Soviet Union, each with national languages, emerged. Increasingly, there was an acceptance of the rights of minorities to speak their own languages. In some countries, this acceptance led to a sudden multiplicity of accepted languages and to a sharp rise in translations within the borders of nation states.

This is the period that I shall focus on in particular.

Until the 20th century

the only modes of translation were written translation and consecutive interpreting and sometimes also "whispered interpreting" which is nearly simultaneous with the original utterances.

The 20th century

At the beginning of the 20th century, with the introduction of silent movies, pictures alternated with **intertexts.** They rendered utterances ('What are you doing?' and 'I feel sick') and were a prerequisite for understanding the plot.

The introduction of talking films (1927), where the utterances are heard simultaneously with the action, added new modes of linguistic transfer:

One of these was **synchronisation** or **dubbing**, in which the original is provided with a target-language dialogue spoken by actors and recorded for target audiences in countries importing the film.

Another mode primarily connected with the importation of foreign films is **subtitling** in which the dialogue of the original is retained in the film's soundtrack and the contents transferred to target-language writing. This is sometimes done from the written scripts, but these are often unreliable. Therefore, most professionals prefer to listen to actual speech in movies and the like. The transfer is thus (ideally) from oral source texts to a hopefully idiomatic, written translation

A third mode found in films is **voice-over**, in which the original speaker is either muted or removed and instead there is a voice (of an actor or announcer) rendering the speech or dialogue in the target language. There are sometimes two voices, namely a man and a woman representing male and female characters respectively. … // 276 … In either case, the translator will work either from written or spoken 'originals' and render them in writing for the persons speaking in the film or documentary in the target language.

The 20ᵗʰ century also saw the introduction large-scale of **simultaneous interpreting** where delegates speak into microphones linked to the interpreters' booths and the interpreters render the speeches into the target language. This mode had its international breakthrough at the Nuremberg war crime tribunals in 1945 against the Nazi leaders of Adolf Hitler's Germany. We may exemplify this by using the negotiations between an English and a Romanian delegation using their respective languages:

A Romanian delegate makes a speech containing a number of points in Romanian. He uses a microphone which is heard only by two English interpreters whose understanding of Romanian is perfect. They render the points made by Romanian into English immediately as they hear them (time-lag 2-10 seconds). Their English rendition is heard by the English delegates who use earphones (and thus do not hear the Romanian speech). An English delegate can then take the floor, answer the points and perhaps add some new ones. These are heard only by two Romanian interpreters who have a perfect command of English, and these interpreters render the points of the English speech into Romanian. This mode of translation thus introduces near-simultaneity between the source-text and the target text, the translational product. The rendition is oral to oral. There are other forms of simultaneous interpreting: there is often simultaneous interpreting at international press conferences, and in some countries, such as Austria, news programmes use media interpreting, showing e.g. British footage but providing simultaneous interpreting.

Since 1980 it has become customary to have operas sung in the original language (that is, mostly Italian, German, or Russian). In these cases, a translation is displayed above and occasionally on the side of the stage, **opera translation**.

Some modes of linguistic transfer are confined to special areas: voice-over is employed for documentaries and children's programmes in virtually all countries and for films in relatively poor countries. Subtitling is found in countries where the population is literate notably small ones (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, all with less than 8 million inhabitants), for films appealing to 'small' audiences (German serials broadcast at night in Great Britain, European films screened for intellectuals in Buenos Aires, Argentina, etc.). Religious interpreting which is a 'no-no' for European interpreters is practiced in overseas Chinese communities. …// 277 …

Institutionalised translation

The Chinese translation of the Buddhist sutras, which as mentioned began around AD 150, is among the first known instances of institutionalised translation. Others were the Arabic centres of translation in the city of Baghdad in the ninth and tenth centuries, and in present-day Spain, mostly in Toledo in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Paradoxically, these Arabic translation activities saved many of the central works of Greek and Roman philosophy and science as well as much Arabic scholarship for the European renaissance (c AD 1400). The first well-documented truly multilingual political meeting in Europe was the 'Congress of Vienna' (1814-1815) where more than 200 European rulers and their delegates met in the capital of Austria to determine European borderlines after the Napoleonic Wars.

Today, there are many international organisations that have several official languages: the United Nations uses English for internal work, but issues political statements simultaneously in its six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. The language work is done by a permanent staff of c 450 translators and 150 interpreters in addition to free-lancers. The largest professional staff of translators is found at the European Union institutions. They tie together 27 European countries by means of translation from and into the 23 official languages.[1] These institutions have staffs of nearly 1,000 interpreters and 3,000 translators and terminologists.

Interpreters at a European Union institution

Minority languages

At the same time there has also, both nationally and internationally, been a growing awareness of minorities' right to have their own language even within major nations. In Europe, Switzerland has always accepted four languages among its citizens (French, German, Italian, and Rhaeto-Romance). The modern European nation states were created in tumultuous processes lasting up to nearly two-hundred years after the Napoleonic wars. These nation states have often had difficulties in accepting minority languages: Official Spain only accepted the minority languages of some of its regions within the last twenty years and Latvia, which gained independence in 1991, only accepted the rights of its 40% Russian minority a few years ago. So the process of acceptance of minority languages is slowly but surely gaining ground. In the US, the 'cradle of democracy' which prides itself on its human rights, it is only within the last decades that everybody on trial in a court of law has obtained the right to be present not only physically but also linguistically (by means of translators and interpreters). …// 278 …

Minor and major languages

It is even more interesting that the division between major and minor languages is getting blurred: when six European nations laid the foundation stones for the European Union in 1952, Italian and Dutch both became 'official languages', but most negotiations and daily work were conducted only in German and French. When Denmark (5.2 million inhabitants), Ireland, and the UK entered in 1973, the tables were all of sudden turned as the English and Danes demanded 'equal linguistic rights' – and eventually got some concessions. At that stage Denmark itself had accepted that its own linguistic minorities in the North Atlantic, the Faeroe Islands (44,000 inhabitants) and Greenland (56,000 inhabitants) should have near-autonomous status and their own parliaments for local affairs.

The world domination of English as 'lingua franca' should also be taken with a large grain of salt: far from all people who claim to speak 'English' are understandable to most other speakers of English, native as well as non-native. We are seeing a segmentation of 'English'. I predict that there will be a 'world English of top speakers and teachers of Received Standard English' or, in the US, a 'world American'. These branch out into national varieties of Australian, New Zealand, and South African English, all of which have an identity of their

own but are spoken by many or even most inhabitants in these countries. Then there are countries in which English is used for business purposes between people of the same 'nationality': Nigeria comprises more than 100 indigenous languages. South Africa has eleven official languages and, in addition, numerous 'heritage languages' which are the first languages spoken by people (at home and in families).

Experts in various fields communicate internationally at conferences, in journals and on the Internet in some variety of English which is often opaque to outsiders but which has become the acknowledged standard in their respective fields: the essential message is encoded in equations, drawings, sketches and the like, rather than idiomatic and syntactically correct 'English'.

We will therefore not be faced with one 'world-English' but with a very large number of 'regional Englishes' as second languages as well as social and educational segmentations of these types of English. Experts will use types of English that differ from those of tourists, and so on. In other contexts, most obviously international politics, industry, and business, the top politicians and executives will have to depend on the services of linguistic middlemen whose foreign language and cultural competence is tops: …// 279 … There will be an explosion in the number of translators, interpreters, subtitlers, surtitlers and the like, in the globalised world of tomorrow.

National languages and even minority languages will not be replaced by a world English in the foreseeable future. There are clear indications that the minor languages are hitting back: whereas English was the dominant language on the Internet in terms of web sites, home pages and the like in the mid-1990s, the latest figures show that it is now down to 40% of the number of accessible home pages – to which we should add that most 'chatrooms' are local and not English at all.

The last decade of the 20th century

The most momentous and sudden changes in the world of translation and interpreting took place in the last decade of the 20th century.

The increased internationalisation and augmentation in translation work meant that language combinations which had not been taken into account previously gained importance, such as the languages of South East Asia.

The 'machine translation systems' came of age, and developed in ways that could be put to practical use around 1990.

The large-scale use of computers (and the complementary electronic tools including translation memories) by all the 4,000 language professionals at the European Union institutions meant that enormous corpora of translations became available to all staff.

Finally, in 1992, the world-wide web became accessible.[2] Machine Translation took to the Internet in 1997.

The changes are daunting.

Teamwork

These changes can probably best be described by two key terms: **recycling** and **teamwork**. These were rarely key words in the West previously. There is now a dawning comprehension, notably in politics and education, that groups of people may share loyalties and can work together as equals, recognising differences in ability, competence, and knowledge. Teamwork has been particularly slow to seep down in most professional translation circles in the West where - until twenty years ago – one would meet translators who jealously guarded and treasured their specialist vocabularies. However, the practice has been well known for half a century in some translation agencies. …// 280 …The United Nations as well as the European Union both of which have come into existence after 1945, have recycled translations in so far as new legislation would have to follow the precise wording of previous translations concerning the same topic. Until the large-scale introduction of computers, the mere identification of such previous translation ('documentation') was time-consuming as it demanded use of dictionaries, terminology lists, and complex indexing systems. Now the translators in these organisations can, immediately, store all documentation for assignment in their computers and access the whole store of the organisation's previous translations of legally binding agreements. The computer will tell the translator immediately whether a sentence has been translated before and in which form: if legally binding, the phrasing of the first finalised directive cannot be changed. However, if it is an *ad hoc* translation, the translator can re-use previous suggestions or – perhaps – be inspired to write something new and more adequate. There are numerous Translation Memory systems on the market, with TRADOS, SYSTRAN and Déjà-vu dominating in Europe.

The European Union institutions now have their own advanced version of the SYSTRAN machine translation system which is used for 'translating' more than 500,000 pages a year for non-linguistic staff. Functioning reasonably

well between English, French, and Spanish, This system is strictly for internal use, the products must not be released to others than the user in question, and it is not accessible to the public. It serves mostly to give staff members an overview of the general contents of a document. In some rare cases and under careful revision, they may serve as raw drafts for translations made by human translation.

Small translation agencies usually specialise in one or two fields and cater for a limited number of clients. This means that there will often be previous translations concerning the subject matter. When they introduce translation memory systems (often abbreviated to TM) these function well for translation work. It takes a firm with four translators about six months before the investment begins to pay off, as they accumulate previous translation and can consequently increase the number of pages they translate per day.

Internet translation

The principles of Internet translation are, to some extent, the same as those mentioned above. Small surprise, for the machine translation system available free of charge is, usually, an earlier version of SYSTRAN than the one for sale on the commercial market. The procedure is extremely simple. One finds a source text and asks to have it translated – by means of what is termed 'translate', 'translator', or 'language tools' and has a translation in English, Spanish, or French. It will have been noted that I focus on these three languages only, although the Internet system prides itself on having numerous language combinations. …// 281 … The reason is that, at present, English, French, and Spanish are the only language combinations that work well enough to give a general idea of the potential of Internet translation. In the case of English, this is clearly because so much has been translated into and from it. French is strong because it was previously used in international treaties – and more importantly – because all documents in Canada must be written in both Canadian-English and Quebequois-French, the latter having much in common with written French. Spanish is strong partly because of translation activity between South and North America and also because Spanish translators are good at providing the machine systems with feedback leading to improvements.

In order to provide my readers with a general impression of the potential relevance of Internet translation, I can give a real-life example: I pick an article in the national Spanish newspaper 'El mundo' (= The World) at the site 'www.elmundo.es':

"Y la sharia funciona perfectamente en Sokoto [in Nigeria]. 'Este es el lugar más seguro del país. Aquí nunca hubo matanzas, come en el estado vecino de Kano [another province in Nigeria]', asegura un cristiano que tiene aquí un comercio desde hace 25 años"

I ask for a translation from Spanish into English. In a fraction of a second, I get the following rendition: "And the sharia works perfectly in Sokoto. "This it is the place more surely of the country. Here never there were slaughters, like in the neighboring state of Kano," assures a Christian who has been having here a commerce for 25 years."

There are howlers, to be sure. But we can easily rephrase the above translation into something readable: "The sharia works well in Sokoto. "This is the safest place in the country. There have never been any murders here, unlike in our neighbouring state of Kano," assures a Christian man who has had a business here for 25 years."

At a guess nearly 10 million pages are 'translated' in this way on the Internet every day. Just think of what will happen when Internet translation is just as adequate between Romanian and English and other language combinations.

Predictions

The Internet will not put translators out of business – on the contrary, the world will need more translators. Their work will become increasingly specialised and with a steady shift towards more intelligent control of the work done by previous translators as well as machines and technological tools. …// 282 …

It is a guess on my part that, since the power of the computer hardware is doubled every 18 months, we shall in the near future see programmes that can search a million bilingual home pages in a matter of seconds and suggest different translations which are equally adequate in different situations for the same source-language segment.

At the same time, we have to rethink our approaches to translation and translational products.

The autonomous translations

In a study of translations of the Tales of the brothers Grimm into Danish over a 170-year time-span (Dollerup 1999), I found that different translations of the same stories may co-exist, even be published the same year and sell well. My study also showed that translations may persist even when the original is

'lost'. Thus some Grimm tales translated into Danish remained 'alive' in Denmark for nearly 80 years in the bourgeois Danish translation of the Grimm Tales, even though the stories had only appeared in one of the seven 'authorised' German editions.

This leads to the question of translations' independence of the source-text. It is not confined to translations of fairytales. It also goes – more strikingly – for the Christian Bible (that is 'the New Testament') which, as mentioned, has no extant Aramaic 'original'. Nevertheless, this book has permeated Western life for nearly 2,000 years.

In other words, translations acquire an autonomous life not only in terms of being selected for translation, but also in their translated forms.

Today, most things we buy come with manuals and in many countries come in several languages. They are made by agencies that outsource the translation work, and in them, texts in various languages co-exist. The only text that we read, is the one in our native language. The other translations exist only physically, but we do not imbue them with life as they are incomprehensible and irrelevant to us. The manuals are also changing: every time a new feature is added to the commodity in question, translators are asked to translate. Of course they do not re-translate the whole text: they merely insert or delete the appropriate phrases – there is not really any 'original' any more.

The well-defined source text of yesteryear's elitist contexts is gradually receding. Today many texts are handled by numerous people at different stages in the production of a 'tranlation': in the source language, there may be several 'authors', the process of translation may involve various translators and teams, and the target texts may be 'localised', i.e. adapted to the conventions and standards of the target culture. …// 283 …

The interplay of forces

A translation has to function in other cultures than the one in which it originated. Speaking about translation, a Chinese scholar Ju Miao (2000) has used the term 'transplantation': "When we transplant a tree, we suddenly cut if off from its natural, peaceful environment, its ecological system. The tree is no doubt seriously affected if not disastrously so. In its transportation to distant lands, the tree definitely suffers from the changes, though we make efforts to preserve its entirety. When we plant it in the foreign, remote soil, our principal concern is to make it survive and flourish in the foreign land. The tree must endure changes and get along with the new environment. It will become part of other ecological systems

and play a new role, which is the purpose of the transplantation. The implications of this analogy in the context of translation will signify an inclination towards target orientation" (Ju 2000: 202).

I would like to add: if translational products are to survive, they should as far as possible, be made by native speakers – people who are familiar with the target culture and able to phrase messages in a clear, fluent or, if you like, elegant way in order to carry conviction with target audiences.

Note
The information in this article derives mostly from interviews with people in the world of translation such as presidents of national associations (e.g. Slovenia, Hungary, Russia, etc), staff at language institutions (e.g. South Africa, Denmark) and with staff and directors of the translation and interpreting services of organisations including the United Nations and some of the European Union institutions. The history of translation and Translation Studies are also based on my own work. There are numerous other versions.
1. Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Slovene, Slovak, Spanish, and Swedish.
2. The World Wide Web was created by Tim Berners-Lee while he worked at the leading European scientific laboratory for fundamental particle research in Switzerland (CERN). The system was originally developed around 1990 in order to allow large groups of researchers to keep up to date with recent developments in studies they participated in. The first useful public browser was set up c 1992. … // 284 …

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The lobby of the Opera House, Copenhagen, Denmark