

## REVIEWS of

Dollerup, Cay. *Basics of Translation Studies*. First Edition: China. Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press, China , 2007. 256 pp. 17 RMB



*The Temple of Heavenly Peace, Beijing, China*

The last decades have witnessed a large number of publications in Translation Studies as translation is becoming internationalized. Among the forest of books, Cay Dollerup's *Basics of Translation Studies*, which is dedicated to China, brings new insights to the discipline by offering a critical summary of principles of translation with vivid and cogent examples. As an introduction to Translation Studies for junior teachers and advanced students in China who are interested in this new field, this book has taken the needs of translator training in the non-western world into account and discussed translation and Translation Studies in a global context. It approaches profound professional issues in a precise and logical way, proving the complex, dynamic and relativistic character of translation.

As Vladimir Khairouline comments, "the book is scholarly innovative and a successful attempt to present within a single volume the most renowned Translation Studies conceptions (Vladimir Khairouline, 2006)". The reason may well be that the author is a sharp-minded scholar with a global view and rich experience in teaching in various countries. Cay Dollerup used to be the editor-in-chief of the international key translation journal *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* (now defunct) and the director of the Centre for Translation Studies at Copenhagen University from 1992 to 2006. He is a versatile and productive scholar who has published more than 200 articles, discussing issues ranging from comparative literature, reader response studies, translation theories, translation teaching, translation history, identity in translation to interpreting, subtitling, lexicography and loanwords. Now, he is a free-lance lecturer, a visiting professor at various universities, and the editor of [www.language-international.net](http://www.language-international.net).

Based on his critical reading of previous translation theories and retrospective thinking of issues in Translation Studies, the author presents all his thought-provoking ideas in this book

which is published in China. The book contains 15 chapters. Besides the introductory remarks, it includes The Problem of Western Centrality in Translation Studies, Modes of Translation in the Modern World, The Individual Translator: the Myth of the “Perfect Translation”, The History of Translation, The Nature of Translation, Translation Approaches, Translation and Translators’ Tools, The Translator in Society, Source-text Types, Other Aspects of Source-and Target-text Analysis, Evaluation, Improvement in Translation and Translation Studies, Synchrony and Diachrony in Translation Work, Source Texts and Translation Today. My deep impression on the whole book is that it is highly dialectic, relativistic and full of insightful discussions and comments.

In the foreword, the author says that “I feel that much contemporary academic theory has little to do with the practicalities of translation work. The balance in this book is not necessarily superior to that of others, but I have done my best to avoid making it excessively theoretical by using exemplification”. This statement not only shows the author’s purpose but also pinpoints the main problems in contemporary translation theories. It is true that Translation Studies is flourishing and plenty of books on translation and translation theories are published. But how many of them are worth reading and can guide our practical translation work? China has introduced a series of books on western translation theories, which did bring something new to our translation research, but some of them are even misinterpreted because Chinese scholars sometimes neglected their original contexts. And some of them are so abstruse and theoretical that they are incomprehensible to the beginners who do not know much about translation theories and practice. So I think this book, the first English book written by a western scholar especially for Chinese readers, is a timely practical guidance to our beginners in translation field and a critical theoretical consideration both to experienced translators and to future translators in China.

At the very beginning, the author introduces a preliminary model of translation based on a model of communication involving the sender, the translator, and the recipient. “Translation is normally undertaken in order to fulfill some purpose, which may or may not be ‘identical with’, but usually bears some similarity to, what the original was intended to mean or bring about in the source language, with a recipient in the target language”, so “to qualify as a translation there must be a recognizable relation to the original which may be likened to a chain of cause and effect. It presupposes that somehow or other, the source text exists before the translation. This has usually been considered an essential feature of translation.” This model of communication sets up the tone of the whole book, placing translation as an activity in dynamic social context. It helps the beginners out of the misconception that translation is just a kind of transference from one language into another and also warns the beginners that translation cannot be too much free without taking the original text into consideration.

Since translation is always closely related to languages and cultures, the author writes about the dynamics and instability of cultures and languages and about language families. He deals in detail with the Indo-European one, and especially touches upon the history of the English language. This kind of knowledge is very important for Chinese translators and helps them to understand western translation theories, since many of them are not so familiar with such linguistic background information. It is worthy of note that the author points out the fact that the major Western languages are Indo-European which led inevitably to a Western bias in present-day Translation Studies. It kindly reminds Chinese scholars and translators that the

western translation theories should be studied critically and applied into Chinese contexts appropriately since most theoretical thinking is based on Indo-European languages. Is it true that it is easy to translate between Indo-European languages because they have many similarities? The author lists a number of “problems” for translation including “false friends”, collocations, words that do not match in terms of meaning, marked and unmarked features in languages, and problems with idioms. This list with specific examples convinces us that translation among the Indo-European languages that have much in common still faces numerous challenges, not to mention how difficult it is to translate between Indo-European languages (English) and non-Indo-European languages (Chinese).

The affinity between Indo-European languages, as the author argues, can partly explain why Western theory spends time on such concepts as “equivalence”. By briefly analyzing the theories of equivalence by Nida, Newmark, and Koller, the author points out that the definition is not objective and the concept is ambiguous and inconsistent because it assumes that the translator is in complete command of not only the text for translation but also the source and target language and “does not take into account the asymmetry between the languages and cultures” (60). The concept derives from the translation of such elitist texts as religious and canonical literary texts which assume that the source text is superior. Such theoretical thinking is partial and cannot easily be applied to translation today. “It is also a problem that attention is riveted on ‘equivalence’ between the source and the target texts, implying that they can have equal meaning” (59). Then the author takes his preliminary model of translation to analyze the incompatibility of the ideas of “the omnipotent translator”, “the perfect translation” and the supremacy of the source text, thus further proving that the concept of equivalence cannot hold water with today’s globalised translation work. Therefore, the author claims that many problems in translation can only be approached by tangible “approximations” and the term “adequacy” is preferred as a criterion to judge whether a translation is acceptable or not. “A translation which conveys the meaning of the source text to the target language in a given situation is adequate. It is only the users, clients, senders, recipients, the parties communicating, who can determine whether this criterion is met or not.” Yet, a translation can gradually change from being adequate to inadequate with time and changes in language and culture, which in turn calls for retranslation.

The book discusses some prominent schools in Translation Studies, notably those challenging the role of the source text. In discussion of source-text types, the author uses a simple model distinguishing between the sending and receiving sides and introduces Reiss’ basic textual categories and the correspondent translation strategies to reach “the most satisfactory results” (147). He argues that early studies focused on the sending side and equivalence with the main dividing line going between the literal and free strategy. He then addresses the functional school and the skopos theory which shift the focus to the receiving side and pay special attention to elements of culture. Then, approaches to textual analysis by Peter Newmark, Christine Nord and Mary Snell-Hornby are examined with a subsequent discussion about Descriptive Translation Studies, their tenet being “any kind of linguistic message which is accepted as translation by the receiving side is worthy of study as a translation” (162). The author agrees with the argument of this school deciding that it is the receiving side that defines whether a text is a translation or not, and he also sets up his own retrospective model for textual analysis which operates at six levels: four of them being text-

internal layers and the other two text-external factors. The model is well-suited for comparisons, both between source texts and their translations and translations that relate to the same original, and is viewed as “non-judgmental criteria for assessment of the adequacy of a translation” (162). In today’s world, there is simultaneity and synchrony in the publication of many source texts and translations. This elaboration shows that the author has made out the subtle or obvious linkages between the research findings of other scholars, based on which his own point of view is presented.

For better illustration of the nature of translation, the author employs clear charts and figures to introduce types of models, including comprehensive models; process-oriented models such as Wilss’s model, Nida’s model; Gile’s model; managerial models set up by Morry Sofer and Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown. Based on the discussions of these models, he critically points out that the models do not fully take into account a number of factors in real-life translation: (1) relay translation; (2) that a source-language text does not become an “original” until it has been subjected to a translation process which leads to a target-language produce, (3) the coexistence of the source text and a translation in another language, (4) the coexistence of professional translations in different target languages as well as within the same target culture (as retranslations), and (5) the simultaneous existence of several translations of the same source text in classroom settings (92). These keen observations and analysis are really comprehensive and persuasive, which again shows the author’s constructive talent in Translation Studies.

As an outstanding teacher of many years in various countries, the author also provides innovative ideas of translation teaching and training, which are mainly summarized into three aspects: firstly, he draws inspiration from Andrew Chesterman and illustrates how the philosopher Karl Popper’s schema of problem solving (P1 (problem 1) > TT (tentative theory) > EE (error elimination) > P2 (problem 2) is applicable to translation. This model provides an effective method for students to improve translation quality by following the principle of “practice > theory > practice”. It proves to be a good strategy for learning translation.

Secondly, he points out the necessity of distinguishing foreign language teaching from translation teaching by stating that “one factor crucial to translation teaching is a natural evolution of a foreign-language teaching tradition at a national level”. Getting hints from the evolution of foreign-language teaching, the author creatively puts forward a new concept of “generations”. It means teachers, at different level of foreign language proficiency, can span, move through or represent four to five generations: The first generation teachers tend to be proponents of a literal, if not word-for-word, translation; the second generation teachers are the first to do translation on a tolerably regular basis, on a relatively literal translation strategy; the third generation teachers will stress fluency, and may well be on a sentence-by-sentence level. These developments will continue with the fourth, fifth and subsequent generations, but never to a point where translators are 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 translators can render the source text adequately in the target language. The sketch takes into account the teachers’ backgrounds, use of tools, and competence; changes in teaching emphasis; the need to share information, and the importance of awareness of other directionalities than the traditional one in translation work. This concept really provides good references for reforming translation teaching in China and consequently

the fourth or fifth generation teachers are favored to teach translation or to do translation work.

Thirdly, the author mentions an important parameter in the teacher-student-material triad, which is the ‘certainty-uncertainty’ axis, indicating students’ and teachers’ conscious and unconscious knowledge of their individual mastery of the source and target languages that can influence their views of each other. This is a sensitive issue that can only be approached delicately. Texts used in the classroom as teaching material also bear some special traits in that they are particularly selected and edited for training purposes, either unidirectional or double-directional. Limited to text types and variety of situations, they are certainly different from materials for translation in real life cases. Teachers tamper with texts, sometimes to improve the texts stylistically, sometimes out of personal considerations as they find something so hard to translate themselves that they do not expect students to handle it either. In the classroom, teachers have to accept their own fallibility esp. when the target text is the mother tongue so that students are capable of assessing ‘errors’ concerned and disagree with the teacher’s version. Such open discussions will lead to insightful discoveries and valuable hypotheses serving as the basis for establishing theory.

Besides these critical considerations on some issues in Translation Studies, the author also mentions many new phenomena and minor problems that tend to be overlooked or underrated in translation practice and research, or have been frequently taken for granted by many authors of textbook, such as copyright, relay, recycling, machine translation and retranslation. For example, in case a translation is not made directly from the original source language, but in relay, both the original and the translation are copyright material. And the fact is that translators have recycled all along.

The author also discusses many of the most controversial topics in translation and reaches comprehensive conclusions. For instance, the central issue in translation discussions is whether one should translate literally or freely. Careful analysis of specific examples shows that the free vs. literal dichotomy turns out to be highly relativistic and dependent on modes, language pairs, and translator competence, factors that are not always heeded. The dichotomy is admittedly useful in well-defined contexts within specific language pairs but it cannot be used for universal generalizations.

Translators and evaluators are considered important agents in translation. The author analyzes the tools that translators have at their disposal and the translators’ role in society and in specific translational situations. Thus translators’ status should be discussed in detail: translators in small countries have a higher status in their respective societies than translators in large countries; translators of literature seem to enjoy a greater prestige than others; translators at international organizations have earned grudging acceptance by the rest of the staff as translation has become accepted as part of the process of decision instead of an unwelcome and overlooked afterthought; translators are increasingly credited for translations in magazines and journals; translators’ status also vaguely relates to the length and the quality of the formal training they have received (136). And a translation work should be assessed by different evaluators, including clients and senders, translators, revisers, teachers, scholars and “communities”.

Finally, the structure of *Basics of Translation Studies* is impressive and reader-friendly: each chapter starts with an outline, followed by learning objectives. The text of the chapter is

subdivided into sections with bold characters and ends with pertinent conclusions. The comprehensive bibliography and the author's own contribution to the development of translation and Translation Studies are very useful to the readers. And another attractive feature is the use of 33 figures, graphs, tables to clarify some complicated issues. The language of the whole book is very clear, concise, and easily read.

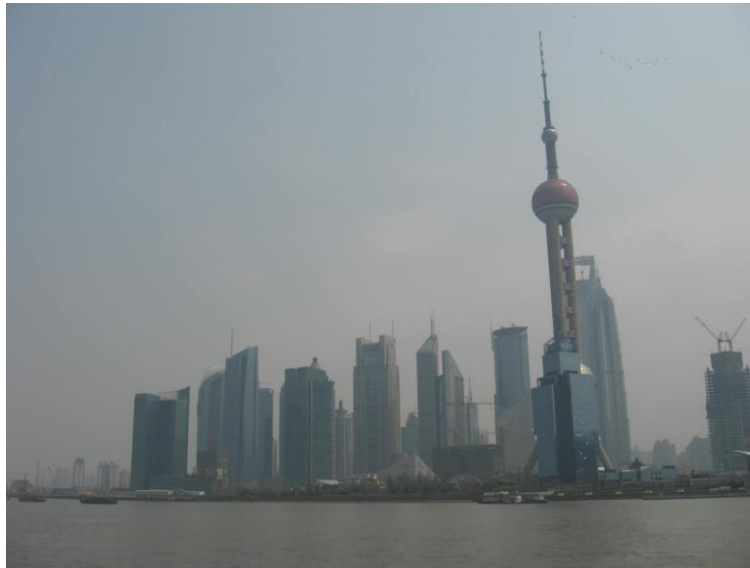
The saying that "nothing is perfect" holds true with this book. For example, on page 13, the author makes a hypothetical graph in the axes of language acquisition and translational competence. This implies that language command and translational competence follow the same line from "zero" to "complete" in the same direction. It seems that language command and translational competence do not necessarily go in line with each other. On one hand, some people may speak and write a foreign language fluently but they cannot translate it. For example, a person can be quite familiar with a foreign language and culture by living in that country for some time and even speak it a near-native level, but this is no guarantee that this person will be proficient in translation. On the other hand, there are good translators mediating between two or more languages and cultural contexts without having perfect command of the language in the traditional sense (usually spoken language). What matters here may be the person's character, communication skills, world knowledge, personal experience, the ability to sense and react, or even the use of body languages, etc. On page 26, the author mentions that "we may talk of British English, American English, Australian English, etc. as different languages", which is not correct, because these are absolutely variants of English. In chapter 5, the history of translation could be more complete if Chinese translation history is also covered. More examples between Chinese and other foreign languages could be more welcome, convincing and interesting to Chinese readers.

All in all, in the author's eyes, translation turns out to be highly **relativistic** due to the **asymmetric** and **dynamic** nature of language and culture, so that any generalization should be avoided in our study and research of translation. From the comprehensive elaboration and discussion, we can get a better understanding of translational activity and gain valuable insights into translation practice and Translation Studies.

### **Reference**

Vladimir Khairoulline , Book Review on Dollerup, Cay. 2006. *Basics of Translation Studies*. (First Edition: Romania). [www.language-international.net](http://www.language-international.net). (*Nauchno-Tehnicheskaya Informaciya. Series 1*. Moscow: VINITI of the Russian Academy of Sciences # 6 (2007) [in Russian].)

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*The skyline of Pudong, Shanghai*

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Dollerup, Cay 2007. *Basics of Translation Studies*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. [www.sflep.com](http://www.sflep.com)

This new textbook for translator trainers is dedicated to China. With the needs of translator training in the non-western world in mind, Dollerup considers translation from a global perspective. The overview of theories and practices in translation are explained in a professional context and make the course accessible, especially as a guide in teaching beginner students. Originating from the author's online teacher-training courses made for the New York University, it is also based on his teaching experience at various Chinese universities and of course in his homeland, Denmark.

As an introduction to translation the book gives translator trainers material to teach a basic understanding of the complexities of translation and to deal professionally with the many choices that need to be made. It refers to the history, theory and practice of translation and interpreting and draws on many examples to illustrate the dilemmas a translator faces. Is there such a thing as a 'perfect' translation, or can we only strive toward 'adequacy'? How does one assess this?

The first chapters are about the phenomena of languages and cultures, stressing that both cultures and languages are constantly in a state of flux. Other basic questions that are addressed are: what is the translator's social role, what does translation entail, and what multi-media products does the translator produce? With a realistic view on human, technological and economic constraints, Dollerup provides models and suggestions for dealing with these questions. The chapters on text typology and register are appropriate in the supra-cultural context of the book. The final chapter on translation tools glances over the electronic tools available in translation work and their practical benefits in terms of efficiency (quantity) and quality (consistency).

The Outlines, Goals and Summaries to each of the fifteen chapters make this an attractive translator trainer's guide.

The book breathes the sense that the translation profession is rooted in societal dynamics, giving a glimpse of the fascinating aspects of being the mediator between cultures. Its charm is

that it distils the basics of Western translation theory and practice and projects them in a global context. For translator trainers, the book provides food for thought on getting the best out of existing theories and incorporating translation problems specific of their own cultural background.

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