

Teaching translation across European languages

Eva Koberski

Professor at École d'Interprètes Internationaux
Université de Mons - Hainaut (Belgium)

In recent years we have gradually become informed about the fact that in countries whose languages are of limited diffusion (LLDs) like Hungary, Finland, the Basque Country, Yugoslavia, Wales (UK) translators/interpreters besides working into their mother tongue are often asked to translate also into a foreign language like English, French or Spanish, and sometimes into Russian or German. Working into a foreign language is a necessity with regard to LLDs as they are seldom known away from the country itself and in many cases the world can get acquainted with ideas and thoughts conceived in an LLD thanks to these translators/interpreters alone. Consequently LLDs are significant for the theory of translation insofar as they provide pragmatic evidence of phenomena (including the translation of poetry) that one would have otherwise to look for much further afield. For example, translation into major languages —a characteristic of all LLDs— may constitute a common research-field for identifying difficulties as well as problem-solving strategies encountered in the course of work leading to generalizations.

But do we translate into our mother tongue in the same way as into a foreign language? Does it involve the same processes and if not, what are the differences? Can the translator approach with competence all the features (grammar, vocabulary, social-cultural

nuances) in both Source and Target languages? What is translation and what does it really imply? These are some of the questions that need to be asked now that translation has received a vital role in overcoming cultural barriers and fostering human communication and understanding across nations.

The translator has great responsibility in rendering a piece of text into another language. He/she must remain faithful to the original and at the same time work into the Target language (TL) with its limitations and possibilities. It is assumed that the translator moving in two languages at all times he/she becomes keenly aware of the fact that beside dictionary meaning the words also carry associations and allusions implicitly present. This directs the translator into a continuous process of research into both languages. Juxtaposing the two languages makes the translator uncover different ways referring to traditions which leads him/her to realize that no perfect equivalencies exist across languages. There are differences in form but also in objects, phenomena, actions, mental images, social-cultural attitudes all reflected in language.

Language usage is in fact socially-culturally geared¹ and tied to subject-matter. For instance, there is language of narration, language of conversation, language of poetry, each requiring a certain type of grammar, appropriate vocabulary, genre, etc. and this can pose problems in translation even between closely-related languages like French and English. For the translation of grammar in the language of narrative we can quote a typical example. French uses the form of the present quite often for a past event to render a story more alive («le présent historique») while the tense required by the same subject-matter in English is the past.

For the translation of grammar in the language of conversation we would like to draw your attention to one particular domain — «restricted language» (Firth, 1968). The term «restricted language» comprises «greeting formulas and a full range of utterances» (Hymes, 1968,126) recalled from memory. The main characteristic of texts belonging to this domain is that the translation of a grammatical point

by itself is simply not possible as the different constituents in them form un-analysable «wholes» (Lyons, 1969, 416). Such formulae come into life only in relation to the social situation to which they are traditionally applied. Indeed, the rendition of «restricted language» into another language demands that «the craft of translation find its anchor in situational thinking» (Schulte, 1989, 76). This tendency is crucial for the translation of dialogues/parts of dialogues on occasions where language is directly patterned to the situation. In the case of interviews, introductions at banquets and at international gatherings like this here in the Basque Country as well as conversations on video tapes and films used extensively in our modern world, the translator while transposing the words of the speaker has to think also of the addressee in order to produce an acceptable and understandable version fitting the TL with its perception of the world. It becomes evident that in this respect the «who-says-which-lines-to-whom-where-when-how-and-why» ethnolinguistic principle advanced by Hymes (1968) acquires new force. Taking the social-cultural dimension into account, for example, in the «conventional» situation² «Meeting somebody for the first time» the translator will be able to accommodate the French greeting formula «Je suis enchantée de faire votre connaissance, Monsieur/Madame/Mademoiselle» or the Hungarian «Örülök, hogy megismerhettem», the Serbo-Croat «Drago mi je sto sam vas upoznao», the Russian «Mnje ocenj prijatno poznakomitjsja s vami» or the Finnish «Päivää» within the English social-cultural tradition and supply «How do you do?» or simply «Hallo»³.

There is no doubt that in the subject-matter of poetical language one of the most fundamental and necessary directions implies that literal must give way to more liberal or free translation. Consequently the rendering of a grammatical point has to be done in view of respecting the suggestiveness of the original work and finding a solution that would strike the right cultural chord of the TL readership. As an example we can quote *Alicante* by J. Prévert together with its translation done by our Francophone students at the École d'Interprètes Internationaux, Mons, into English, a foreign language to them⁴.

Alicante (J. Prévert)

Un orange sur la table
 Ta robe sur le tapis
 Et toi dans mon lit
 Doux présent du présent
 Fraîcheur de la nuit
 Chaleur de ma vie.

Translation

An orange on the table
 Your dress on the carpet
 And you in my bed
 Sweet present of the present
 Freshness of the night
 Warmth of my life.

Prévert's poem simple in appearance presents stunning examples of the (mis)translation of prepositions. One of the very tricky places of the poem is the preposition «dans» in line 3. The first meaning of «dans» listed in Harrap's Standard French and English Dictionary is «in» so the students' translation is lexically without a fault. It is, however, strikingly skewed because here «in» is collocated with «my bed» which sounds flat and unromantic. Wouldn't we agree that «And you on my bed» had more suggestiveness about it specially with the following «Sweet present of the present»? The translator of poetical language needs to be aware of associations, allusions, mental images characteristic of the Source language (SL) and find ways and means of adapting them to the TL⁵. Another stumbling block for the students was the translation of «sur» in line 2 in collocation with «ta robe» and «le tapis». Again, the dictionary meaning of the words was respected: «your dress», «on», «the carpet». But the questions that immediately spring to mind are: Are the mental images of «ta robe sur le tapis» and «your dress on the carpet» the same/similar/or different? Is it not rather «your dress on the floor» that is romantic while «on the carpet» irrevocably conjures up the image of an unromantic «nasty stain on the carpet» in an English speaking mind. What do we really think we do in the translation process? And what do we actually do? How to decide what word to choose for the translation of a given concept? And how to know if it is the right word? There is a vast area to be researched when it comes to perceiving, and then transmitting the core of a creative writing.

It is considered generally that literary translation, especially when it concerns poetry, is the exclusive domain of translators working

into their mother tongue. The great majority of translations in the world are indeed the evidence of this. It is also an accepted view that literary translation is an unusually complex operation requiring more than grammatical competence and knowledge of dictionary meanings. In rendering a piece of literature into another language the translator becomes something of a creator on the real sense of the word. He/she must perceive the cultural features in the Source text and transpose them into the TL. These features, present explicitly or implicitly, characteristic of a language as a whole, might be a source of ambiguity or potential confusion since their nature is most subtle. Yet, in addition to grammatical components and vocabulary, the translator must distinguish them in order to recreate the atmosphere or the mood of the original work and to communicate the author's intention. The translator has therefore a great responsibility both to the author and to the TL readership. He/she accommodates the text to the limitations and possibilities of the TL having a feeling for both the explicit and the implicit. But how to approach the cultural features? What do they really mean in the SL? Can they be translated at all? Obviously the translator must identify them in order to make the source text accessible to readers of the TL. All these important facts are universally known by translators but not formalized yet to be part of a translation theory.

At this point it is convenient to stand back and take a direct look at the translation activity from minor languages. Hungarian seems to us especially interesting in this respect here as historically it does not belong to the Indo-European language family just like Basque. Structurally it is quite different from the great majority of European languages. For instance, it has 28 cases, natural gender, one pronoun for both sexes (usually used only for emphasis), the verb-endings indicate the person in the singular/plural without any apparent sex-distinction, etc. Hungarian has a rich literary tradition. In the language of poetry it is worth mentioning that as Hungarian is seldom known sufficiently away from the country itself, translators have been practising collaborative work with Hungarian natives. Now the world can read the anthology of *Modern Hungarian Poetry* in English, the

result of joint effort between a number of well-known contemporary poets and the Hungarian editor, translator and literary critic M. Vajda (1977, Corvina Press, Budapest, H.). On the other hand, the creative writings of Éva Tóth, a present-day Hungarian poet, have been successfully translated into French through collaborative work⁶ between Anne-Claire Magnes and the author. At a literary encounter organized by the University of Mons (B) last November the audience had the privilege and pleasure to hear both writers presenting the poem «A világ teremtése: La création du monde» ad voce. The audience agreed that the musicality of the original was matched by that of the rendition —they were equally delightful to the ear.

The poem consists of 7 stanzas with the creation of the world as the central theme. The ancestral woman does all the chores, cleans, makes the fire, picks fruits, gives birth to a child. Her companion feeds and sleeps and every morning he pronounces the Word and by the Seventh Day the World was.

In what follows we are going to quote from the poem the sixth stanza «Hatodik nap»: «Le sixième jour» because it contains a typical translation difficulty from Hungarian into French/English —gender.

Hatodik nap
fájások ébresztettek megszültem
magzatomat megfürűsztöttem bepóltyáltam és
megszoptattam Ö föléhajolt hagyta hogy a kis
kéz megszoritsa az ujját képmására mosolygott
és látá hogy minden amit teremtett vala imé igen jó.

Le sixième jour
les douleurs m'ont éveillée
j'ai accouché de mon enfant je l'ai baigné eta je lui ai donné
le sein
Lui se pencha laissa la petite main serrer son doigt
sourit à son image et il vit que tout ce qu'il avait fait était
bien.

Clearly, the poem is based on actions, and consequently it is full of verbs. It is common knowledge that to translate a verb into French/

English the subject must be explicitly present before the verb; this is not the case with Hungarian where the verb-endings indicate the actor. Besides, as this poem does not contain any name, the sex of the actor —another information required for French/English— can only be inferred from the actions where it is implicitly present. If the actions are biological in nature, they speak for themselves. In the passage above, «accoucher», «donner le sein» the actor can only be a grown-up woman —«elle». She has a companion and a child. As the child is the very image not of her but of her companion, it can only be «lui».

The translation of actions traditionally attributed to women/men/children, however, is more intriguing as there is a whole array of implicit associations, allusions, mental images implied among which refer to our common Judeo-Christian background. This last point naturally leads on to the final motive I would like to touch upon, namely the translation of «felocsúdtam»: «j'ai repris connaissance» in the first stanza, Elsö nap: le premier jour. According to Eckhard's *Hungarian-French Dictionary*, the verb «felocsúdni» covers many different states: «revenir à soi; reprendre connaissance/ses sens/ ses esprit; revenir de son évanouissement/ de son étourdissement». Now the snag is that the Hungarian verb also contains implicitly the state in which Eve found herself after having been chased from the garden of Eden. A.-Cl Magnes said she was not happy about her translation of «felocsúdtam» - «j'ai repris connaissance» was the nearest she could offer for the woman's state for the present moment. «The solution will come», she said, «translations do grow with time».

This quick glimpse into the realm of collaborative work in the field of poetical translation seems to reveal that in rendering a piece of literature the task facing the translator is extremely complex. In the first place, he/she must perceive the structural pattern as well as the cultural traditions in the SL, then try to express them in another language, and finally refine the draft in the TL. To gain space for studying the unconscious movement of the translation process, these three operations could be considered to constitute 3 distinct but

complementary phases of the translator's activity. We think that to approach a variety of texts across a number of language pairs according to these 3 phases would allow us to gain insight into translation difficulties and find problem-solving strategies⁷. The argument is not that an ideal way to tackle translation problems has been devised but rather that based on pragmatic evidence in translation form LLDs into major languages a useful method has been indicated. We believe that such an approach would help us to wean our way to a position to uncover general principles, some concerning implicit factors, thus promoting the theory of translation.

NOTES AND SELECTED REFERENCES

- (1) According to E. Sapir (1968, 315), «culture is ... the expression of a richly varied and yet somehow unified and consistent attitude toward life» therefore, as put by Z. Kufnerová (1988, 224), «the more remote a particular LLD geographically, ... the more difficult is the translation of literary work from such a language».
- (2) Research on «conventional» situations and utterances across 10 languages and in 11 countries was discussed in an international Round Table Conference organized at the University of Mons-Hainaut (B) (Cf. *The social Dimension in Translation into Non-Primary Languages*, eds. E. Koberski & S. Petrequin-Jessen, Nouvelles de la F.I.T., IX, 1990, D.R. Haeseryn, Sint-Amantsberg: Gent (B)).
- (3) In these formulae, French uses the passive in the present, Hungarian and Serbo-Croat the present plus the past, Russian the present plus the infinitive, English the present active or no verb. In Finnish there is no verb either.
- (4) For the study of the translation of *Alicante* into English as a mother tongue/non-primary language, see the contribution of E. Koberski & S. Petrequin-Jessen in *Translation and Meaning*, Part 1, eds. M. Thelen & B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, Euroterm: Maastricht, NL, 1990.
- (5) «Et toi dans mon lit» was rendered into Serb By «A ti draga naga» (And you darling naked) by R. Konstantinović in *Tajna svetkovina*, IDEA, Beograd (You), 1990.

There is a vast field to be researched with regard to suggestiveness according to cultural perception; see in this sense the contribution of S. Petrequin-Jessen in the *Proceeding of the XIIth F.I.T. Congress, Belgrade 1990* (forthcoming).

- (6) In another form of Collaborative work, one person provides a translation draft of the original in the foreign language together with information on the cultural connotations of the work: objects, actions, traditions, beliefs, images, etc. Then a gifted representative of the TL, who has been moved by the poem but has no knowledge of the SL, puts the poem into the TL. This method has been applied by E. Osers, who does not know Albanian, and the result is an anthology of Albanian poetry in English which has received much acclaim.
- (7) In an attempt to learn about translatio problems characterizing the three operations mentioned we have already started some work. We have experimented in the field of translation from Welsh into French/English/Hungarian in collaboration with the University of Wales, Bangor (U.K.); from Hungarian into French/English with the University of KLTE, Budapest (H); from French into Hungarian with the University of Janus Pannonius, Pécs (H). As for the reactions of students translating into/from English, see S. Petrequin-Jessen, Note 5 above.

Firth, J.R. (1968). *Selected Papers of J.R. Firth*, ed. F.R. Palmer, London: Longmans.

Hymes, D.H. (1968). «The Ethnography of Speaking» in *Reading in the Sociology of Language*, ed. J. Fishman, The Hague, Paris: Mouton.

Kufnerová, Z. (1988). «Some thoughts on Translation from Languages of Limited Diffusion», in *Proceedings of the XIth World Congress of F.I.T.*, ed. P. Nekeman, Euroterm Maastricht, NL.

Lyons, J. (1969). *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: at the University Press.

Millis, C. (1988). «Translating Umberto Saba», *Translation Review*, ed. R. Schulte & D. Kratz, The University of Texas at Dallas, U.S.A., n° 27

Osers, E. (1988). «An Uphill Struggle», in *Proceedings of the XIth World Congress of F.I.T.*, ed. P. Nekeman, Euroterm Maastricht, NL.

Sapir, E. (1968). «Selected Writings of Edward Sapir», in *Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. G.D. Mandelbaum, Berkeley: UCP, London: CUP.

Schulte, R. (1989). «The Study of Translation», in *Mid-American Review*, ed. K. Letko, bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403, U.S.A., XI, 2.

LABURPENA

Itzulpen Irakaskuntza Europako Hizkuntzetan

Hedadura Mugatuko Hizkuntzetako (HMH) herrialdeetako itzultzale asko eta asko ama-hizkuntzara itzultzeaz gain, Hedadura Haundiko Hizkuntzetara (HHH) itzultze lanetan ari izaten da. HMHetatik hizkuntza hedatuagoetara egiten den itzulpen mota hori eremu egokia gerta liteke itzulpen mailako zaitasun eta arazoak aztertu eta ebazpideak proposatzeko; itzulpenaren teoria bat paratzeko, azken finean.

Bi hizkuntza edo gehiagotan lan egin behar izaten duen itzultzale orok daki, hitzek, hizkuntza bakoitzean, hiztegiko esanahiaez gain, izaten dituztela bestelako zehar-esanahi eta konnotazio ugari. Horren kariaz, berehala jabetzen da itzultzalea bi hizkuntzen arteko osoko baliokidetasun ezaz.

Hizkuntzaren zernolako erabilera (narrazio-hizkuntza, elkarritzeta-hizkuntza, poesia-hizkuntza, etab.), bestalde, eman beharreko gaiak erabakitzen du, bakoitzak gramatika, hiztegi, erreregistro eta genero egokia eskatzen du larik. Hizkuntza batetik bestera, ordea, aldatu egiten da erabilera hori. Har ditzagun, esaterako, frantsesa eta ingelesa, non, lehenengo hizkuntzak, narraziorako, orainaldi historikoa («le présent historique») erabiltzen baitu kondaketa biziago bat lortzeko; eta ingelesak berriaz, frantsesaren aldean, iraganaldira jotzen du efektu beraren bila. Poesia itzultzaleak bereziki, kontu handiz jaso eta eman behar ditu SHan, genero horren erreregistroak berezko dituen lotura, zehar-esanahi, iradokizun, gogora ekarritako irudi eta abarrekoak. Kultur mailako bereizgarri horiek XHan nola eman, izango du, normalean, itzultzaleak, buruhausterik nekosoen.

HMHetatikako itzulpenari dagokionez, hungariera dugu adibide aproposa; historikoki ez bait dator Indo-Europear hizkuntzen familiatik (28 deklinabide-kasu ditu, jenero naturala, sexu biak izenorde bakarrez emateko sistema, etab.). Hungarieraz sortutako poesiaren itzulpenean (estatu beraren mugetatik kanpo hungariera gutxik ezagutzen duenez), itzultzaleek, hungariar poetekin batera, lankidetzan ihardun dute behin baino gehiagotan. Hala aritu dira Eva Tóth poeta hungariarra eta A.C. Magnes frantziar itzultzalea, lehenengoaren «A világ teremtése: La création du monde» poemaren itzulpenean. Ataza horretan sortutako arazoek balio orokorra dute, ezein literatur lan beste hizkuntza batean emateko zaitasunak objetibatzeko:

- Lehendabizi, SHeko egitura mailako eredu eta tradizio kulturalak hauteman;
- bigarrenik, horiek beste hizkuntza batean ematen saitu;
- eta azkenik, XHan, aurrekoaren emaitza atondu.

SINTESIS

La enseñanza de la traducción en los idiomas de Europa

Muchos traductores de LDL traducen no sólo a sus lenguas maternas, sino también a lenguas de amplia difusión, y este tipo de traducción puede resultar muy interesante y adecuado para analizar los problemas y dificultades con que se enfrenta y buscar su solución; o dicho de otra manera, para elaborar una teoría de la traducción.

Todo traductor que ha de trabajar con dos o más lenguas sabe que las palabras, en muchos idiomas, además del significado recogido en los diccionarios, suelen tener connotaciones y significados colaterales, y que, por lo tanto, no existe una total equivalencia entre ambos idiomas.

Por otra parte, el tipo de lengua que se ha de utilizar (lengua de narración, de diálogo, poética, etc.) viene dada por el propio tema, el cual requiere su propia gramática, léxico, registro y género. Pero este tipo de lengua cambia de un idioma a otro; tomemos como ejemplo el francés y el inglés: en la narración, el primero suele utilizar el presente histórico a fin de obtener un relato de mayor vivacidad, mientras que el inglés prefiere las formas de pasado para conseguir el mismo efecto. El traductor de poesía, en especial, tiene que andar con mucho cuidado para recoger en su traducción las connotaciones, sugerencias, imágenes, alusiones, etc. propias del registro empleado en la lengua de origen. Y el mayor quebradero de cabeza suele residir precisamente en la forma en que debe recoger y dar todas estas particularidades culturales.

Por lo que se refiere a la traducción realizada desde LDL, el caso del húngaro es muy válido a modo de ejemplo, ya que históricamente no proviene de la familia de las lenguas indo-europeas (tiene 28 casos de declinación, género natural, sistema de un mismo pronombre para ambos sexos, etc.). Los traductores de poesía húngara (dado que fuera de sus fronteras, el húngaro es una lengua muy poco conocida) suelen colaborar estrechamente con los propios autores, como es el caso de la obra «A világ teremtése: La création du monde», de la poetisa húngara Éva Tóth, traducida en colaboración entre ella misma y la traductora francesa A.C. Magnes.

Los problemas surgidos en esta tarea tienen un valor general para objetivar las dificultades existentes para la traducción de una obra literaria a otro idioma:

- En primer lugar, hay que determinar los modelos estructurales de la lengua de origen y sus tradiciones culturales;*
- luego hay que intentar transferirlos a la otra lengua;*
- y finalmente, hay que elaborar los resultados obtenidos en la lengua de llegada.*