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UNIVERSALS IN TRANSLATION: A LOOK AT THE ASIAN TRADITION

ABSTRACT

Using as a basis recent publications on translation in Asia, especially the three volumes by St. Jerome, *Asian Translation Traditions*, edited by Eva Hung and Judy Wakabayashi, and the two volumes of *Translating Others*, edited by Theo Hermans, these which have provided a "window on Asia" for many scholars in the area. I shall also bring in some comparisons with translation in South America. The main point of the article is to show that there seem to be universals in the development of translation in a variety of countries. This, however, is also questioned, by the fact that translation studies scholars seem to organize their studies with similar suppositions.

Keywords: Translation in Asia, translation in South America, universals.

RESUMO

Tomando como base recentes publicações sobre a tradução na Ásia, em especial os três volumes lançados pela St. Jerome, "*Asian Translation Traditions*", organizados por Eva Hung e Judy Wakabayashi, e os dois volumes de "*Translating Others*", organizados por Theo Hermans, que proporcionaram a muitos estudiosos da área um olhar sobre a Ásia, também pretendo trazer algumas comparações com a tradução na América do Sul. O objetivo principal do artigo é mostrar que parece haver universais no desenvolvimento da tradução em vários países. Essa hipótese, entretanto, também é questionada pelo fato de que os estudiosos da tradução parecem organizar seus estudos a partir de suposições semelhantes.

Palavras-Chave: Tradução na Ásia, tradução na América do sul, universais.

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Artigo Original
Recebido em: 30/05/2008
Avaliado em: 26/07/2008

Publicação: 30 de setembro de 2008

In this article I shall look at some of the concepts coming from publications on translation in Asia, especially in the three volumes by St Jerome, *Asian Translation Traditions*, edited by Eva Hung and Judy Wakabayashi, and the two volumes of *Translating Others*, edited by Theo Hermans, which have provided a “window on Asia” for many of us. I shall also bring in some comparisons with translation in South America, an area with which I am better acquainted.

An initial panorama shows a number of factors which emphasise the dominance of the west industrially, economically and culturally. Important factors are the introduction of the printing press and easy and cheap distribution of printed material, the military and economic dominance of the Europe and North America in the 19th century, and the opening up of new trade routes, with the result that countries which had been closed to the west such as Turkey, China and Japan opened up, translated military manuals, brought in Western military experts, established language schools to train trustworthy translators and interpreters so they would not be obliged to use the interpreters from the foreign powers, which would give them obvious disadvantages on both the battle field and in commerce.

Judy Wakabayashi (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi 2005:35) mentions that the signing of Treaty of Nanking in 1842, marking the end of the Opium Wars, prompted the Chinese government to translate works of military sciences in an attempt to “catch up” with the West and ensure national survival. This was further stressed by defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5, and the growing dominance of Japan resulted in Japanese works being translated, particularly after Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5. In 1862 the first translation school was set up in Peking to teach English, then Russian, French, German and Japanese, and this was followed by schools in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Taiwan (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 119). There was also a translation bureau in the Jiangnan military Arsenal.

And among the first works translated into Chinese were Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* in 1902, Herbert Spencer’s *The Study of Sociology* in 1903, John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* in 1903, and Montesquieu’s *L’ esprit des lois* in 1909.

In the wake of the immediate necessities of catching up with the West in economic and military terms we find literature imported from the West, an area which has been the focus of considerable study. European models of literature were also imported as the home literatures were seen by many to have been suffering from a hermeticism and lack of contact with the outside world. Initially in a number of countries,

simplified versions were introduced. In Turkey the journalist Ahmed Midhat provided a simplified version of Corneille's *Le Cid*, with a long preface that acted as an introduction to the unfamiliar dramatic form for the Ottoman reader (in Demircioğlu: forthcoming). Dickens was adapted freely in China and Malaya. Simplified versions of Shakespeare's plays were available in many countries, particularly translations of the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare*, which, for example, was available in Japan in 1907 and at least made the basic plots of Shakespeare familiar to many (Gallimore in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol. 2: 485). Doris Jedanski mentions that Malay prose versions of Shakespeare were taken from the Lambs' version (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi: 233).

Versions of Molière and Shakespeare were adapted with name changes and often many modifications in the plot in Egypt. Myriam Salama-Carr (in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol. 2 : 315) writes that initially drama in Egypt, first brought by Napoleon Bonaparte, was staged in the language of origin, and then showed varying degrees of adaptation and acculturation, with a debate over whether classical Arabic or dialect forms were to be used. In Jalal's *Tartuffe*, Tartuffe becomes a bigoted Muslim cleric, and, among other changes, Marianne's objections to her father marrying her to Tartuffe are omitted. The plot of *Andromaque* became more melodramatic, with songs added.

Doris Jedanski (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 211-246) looks at the complex situation of translation in colonial Malaya, where there were often different versions of classic works available in Dutch, Sino-Malay and Sumatran Malay. A Malay adaptation, of *Robinson Crusoe*, making minor adjustments to the original, by the Euroasian Adolf Friedrich von de Wall and published in 1875 was used as a school textbook. The Dutch adaptation of Molière's *L'Avare* was the source for the local Malay version, the Volkslectuur version of 1898, published by the colonial authorities, in which the story was moved to the Islamic household of Hadji Malik in Betawi at the beginning of the 20th century, and then there was the novel of Tamar Djaja in 1941, based on this. The Dutch colonial authorities published translations of manuals and handbooks on baby care, growing pineapples, health care, transport, etc.. Sino-Malay translators produced frequently adapted versions of a mixture of Western authors; Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Maupassant, Tolstoy, Pearl Buck and Edgar Rice Burroughs were all published in the same series.

Translations could show both the positive and negative sides of modern life: the advantages of progress and technology vs. mimicry, alienation and loss of own traditions. They could also be used to question the values of colonial society.

Raniela Barbaza, in (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 247-262) whose work follows on from that of Vicente Rafael, describes the way in which the Spanish metrical romances of Bernardo Carpio were adapted into Tagalog. Barbaza uses the Tagalog term for translation, *pagasalin*, a changing of containers, as an image of the way in which these romances were transferred. By transferring the contents to one's own container one takes control of the contents. The settings become indigenous, and endings are added in which Bernardo Carpio goes off to destroy unnamed creatures, probably the colonizers and colonial forces which could not be named.

In many countries the initial free versions were followed by more accurate versions of a following generation, who insisted on closer translations that would respect the original to a greater extent. Saliha Paker describes the classics debate in Turkey which followed Ahmed Midhat's initial adaptations, in which he was severely criticized for his lack of respect for the original texts (in ed. Hermans, Vol. 2: 325-348).

Theresa Hyun (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 156-7) describes the situation in Korea, where, after an initial period of adaptations and summaries, there followed a period of specialized training in foreign languages with literary groups proclaiming faithfulness to the source text. In literary journals of 1920s debates on the desirability of free vs. literal translations, with the Foreign Literature Research Association stating that the translation of foreign literary works would expand the expressive possibilities of Korean literature, and the importation of foreign terms through translation would broaden the scope of the Korean language.

But this may not be the norm for all societies. Rita Kothari (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 263-273) states that the initial close scholarly translations of legal and scriptural texts made after the arrival of printing in 1800 by orientalist, who would often explain their choices was followed by a shift to a liberal attitude in the 19th century.

Cheap printing techniques in the 19th century resulted in an explosion of translations of popular literature, much of it translated in many countries. Dime novels, romances, Sherlock Holmes. A number of studies made. Şehnaz Tahir-Gürçağlar comments that translations of Sherlock Holmes into Turkish in the 1930s were often followed by pseudotranslations (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2002: 44-60). Rita Kothari (in ed.

Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 263-273) describes the recent pseudotranslations of Ashwini Bhatt, who, after translating the complete works of John Gardner, began to produce pseudo-translations of Gardner then wrote his own novels, which have become popular bestsellers. Judy Wakabayashi reports that in Vietnam, China and Japan the spread of cheaper editions and the establishment and growth of public and subscription libraries towards the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century led to a democratization of the audience also with more women reading fiction. Classic Chinese novels were adapted into Korean and transformed to a more popular genre.

The period of the translation of mass literature came later in South America. Adriana Pagano and I have described the growth in number of translated works in the 1930s and 1940s in Argentina and Brazil (Pagano 2001) (Milton 2001).

The intellectuals and literati may feel overwhelmed by the dominance of European ideas and literary forms and rebel against them looking to native indigenous forms, thereby excluding translation, at least from European languages, if not from indigenous forms. The Brazilian modernists are a case in point. Tupi or not Tupi was the motto of Oswald de Andrade. But they failed to translate from the indigenous language of Tupi. Oswald originated the concept of literary cannibalization, which has gained considerable ground in translation studies. The Brazilian writer, or for that matter the writer whose literature is dominated by foreign models, will swallow, absorb, the literature of the dominant culture, digest it, then use it in a different form. It must not be purely regurgitated and reproduced. Haroldo de Campos never actually described his work as cannibalism, always using such terms as recreation and transcreation, but Else Vieira popularized this term when describing his work. His translations and translation theory stresses the way in which certain elements may be “Brazilianised”. His translation of the second part of Goethe’s *Faust*, as well as introducing Germanic neologisms into Portuguese, contains fragments of references to Brazilian writers and the film maker Glauber Rocha (Vieira 1994).

Recreation, though not in Haroldo de Campos’ case, may contain elements of popularization. G. Gopinathan (in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol. 1: 236-246) links transcreative translation to rebirth, describing the way in which the erudite Sanskrit plays are with a social purpose and interpolations, explanations and expansions, summaries and innovations in present day India in local languages rather than in the initial erudite Sanskrit, with the translators “spiritually educating those who were separated from the ancient age by time and language”.

Translation is often used as a form of nation building. The German case is well-known to all. Theresa Hyun mentions Korea in the 1930s (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 44) where there was a focus on the translation of historical works and legendary texts so as to encourage patriotism aimed at nation building. (in ed. Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 155-168) - And in the 1920s and 1930s female translators began to use a more colloquial language in their translations, thus changing translation norms. Ch'oe Namson and Yi Gwang-Su Ch'oe made translations of Byron, Tolstoy, Hugo, Tennyson and others with intention of inspiring patriotism in young readers and contributing to nationalist feelings. For Yu the translation of foreign works would play a crucial role in raising the level of Korean literary nationalism, and the delicacy of foreign languages would enrich the Korean language.

Under the nationalist populist government of Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s economic conditions were propitious for a vast increase in the number of works, both classical and popular, which were translated for the first time. Adriana Pagano and myself have written on the same phenomenon in Argentina and Brazil (Pagano 2001) (Milton 2001).

In Turkey as from 1939 until the 1960s the government run Translation Bureau sponsored the translation and publication of a large number of Western classical works, as part of the programme to bring Turkey closer and closer to the West and further away from what it considered the "backward" east, particularly emphasizing the translation of Greek and Latin classics

Although the examples I have given may not be so familiar, many of the concepts I have mentioned neatly fit into many of the standard parameters and arguments of translation studies that we are all familiar with: foreignization vs domestication; postcolonial translation; adaptations and localizations of plays and popular genres such as detective fiction and romances; and even cannibalization has now become widely known.

Can we say that there are certain universals in translation studies as the above has tentatively shown? Myriam Salama-Carr (in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol 1: 124) also quotes from Al-Jahiz, (d. 868) in his *Kitab al-Hayawan* "The translator must demonstrate the same lucidity of expression and the same level of knowledge as the author that he translates. He must know the source language very well, and the one into which he translates equally well" and complains that a conference interlocutor wrongly thought that she was quoting from Etienne Dolet."

Moreover, the Chinese concepts of *xin*, *da* and *ya*, as mentioned by Martha Cheung (in ed. Hermans 2006: 94), discussing the work of the Chinese scholar Yan Fu in 1898, neatly fit into a Drydenesque paradigm of, respectively, “faithfulness”, “comprehensibility”, and “elegance”.

Translation universals? Or can we say that our thinking on translation outside the west has been decided by our translation studies templates, that authors fit their studies into those concepts we are familiar with? Eva Hung (in ed. Hermans 2006: 157) mentions that most TS scholars come from Modern Language departments and do not have access to Classical language and literature studies. In Turkey very few academics who work with translation studies can read the Ottoman Arabic alphabet, which was discontinued in favour of the Roman alphabet in 1928.

Certain authors are quite aware of this: borrowing a warning from Dirk Delabastita, Myriam Salama-Carr (in ed. Hermans 2006: 122) mentions that the “selection of my data was likely “to be directed by certain a priori assumptions”.

Martha Cheung discusses the difficulties of deciding on the title of the collection of writings on translation in Chinese. “Chinese Translation Theory” might sound as if a systematic Westernized thinking were being imposed, and this would restrict the range of works she could include. She would also lose a number of the associations of *lilun*, the Chinese term used for theory, but which had previously been used for “to argue with”, “to discuss or talk about”, ‘to deliberate upon the *li*, the reason, truth, principles of things” (in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol. 1: 91). She finally chose “Chinese Discourse on Translation”.

And *xin*, our Drydenesque elegance, is hardly just that. It is equally complex, taking on different meanings in different contexts (in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol. 1: 95): Martha Cheung gives some of them: *kexin*, “trustworthy or reliable”; *xengxin*, “integrity”; *xinyi*, “righteousness”.

Harish Trivedi has similar problems with Indian terms for translation. After a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to compare a number of Indian terms for “translation” to the western concept of “translation” Harish Trivedi points to some of the problems: “These terms... are not and cannot become synonymous and optional words for the English term ‘translation’, for to the extent that they are synonymous, they are so only within the language(s) and the cultural tradition they belong to [...] To parade them in a comparative context together with the Western term(s) for translation, with all the discriminating care in the world, is still to offer them for inclusion in an alien discourse

in an alien language; it is perhaps to sell them short. What use are they, and how are they going to be used, out of their context?" (in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol. 1: 117)

Trivedi's essay goes against the grain. His potted history of translation in India stresses that between 1500 BC and 1800 AD there is no evidence of any text of any kind being translated into any Indian language. Certainly, as the use of Sanskrit declined the great texts of the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavatpurana* were rewritten in the newer Indian languages but these versions were never looked at as translations though nowadays we consider them as adaptations (in ed. Hermans, Vol. 1: 106).

Translation was brought to India by the British. With the spread of the printing press, it was possible to distribute translations of English literature in the various Indian languages, and then spread to translation between the various Indian languages though certain practices of adapting the classical works were maintained as names and references in Shakespeare's plays, for example, were localized. Moreover, the term *anuvad*, which had previously meant ritualistic repetition, was appropriated to be used for translation.

Trivedi goes on to mention Gayatri Spivak's discussion of the colonial subject once "a blank, though generative of a text of a cultural identity that only the West (or a Western-model discipline) could inscribe" (Spivak 1999: ix apud Trivedi in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol. 1: 117). But now the "once-subaltern" figure has a voice, but the voice will be that of migrant to the First World or a postcolonial speaking subject, speaking the language of the erstwhile colonizer, and will be of "crucial assistance to the North in keeping up its resource-hungry life-style" (Spivak 1999: vi apud Trivedi in ed. Hermans 2006, Vol. 1: 117). And academic resources are amongst the resources that are required by the West. As our discipline of Translation Studies grows we need more and more resources to fuel conference papers, publications, theses, research proposals, and subjects for conferences.

By looking towards Asia, despite a certain amount of the straitjacketing of the individual translation histories of certain countries, as has been seen above, it does seem that certain historical patterns are followed in various societies. We can also say, going against Trivedi's view, that the act of translation itself seems to be common to all societies.

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