

Book Review of Translation, History & Culture Bassnet, Susan and Lefevere, Andre (eds) Pinter Publishers: London (1990)

This book – a collection of twelve essays, by twelve different authors – reflects the works being currently undertaken in Translations Studies. It is possible to visualize the basic thread that links all papers: a culturally oriented approach to translation and its role in the shaping of society. In light of this new approach, the object of Translation Studies has been redefined: it reflects a shift from a mere descriptive form of translation into the understanding of the manipulative processes that operate in both oral and written texts to function in a given culture, in a given way.

Andre Lefevere's "Translation: Its Genealogy in the West", as its title clearly suggests, attempts a sketch of a genealogy of translation by documenting, through empirical historical research, the changes he points out. To explain these changes he goes into the exercise of power in society, and what it means in terms of the production of culture, of which translation is part.

Palma Zlateva wrote "Translation: Text and Pre-Text, 'Adequacy' and 'Acceptability' in Crosscultural Communication", a paper in which she introduces the concept of 'Pre-text'. By 'Pre-text' she means the cultural assumptions that largely determine the success or failure of translated texts in the target culture, and which has nothing to do with the quality of the translation itself.

Anne Mette Hjort and her "Tranlation and the Consequences of Scepticism" puts in jeopardy the positivistically posited existence of the so-called "absolute standards" by which a translation should be measured. She states that norms, rules and appropriateness conditions are liable to change. Translations made at different times, under different conditions, will inevitably turn out differently, not because they are "good" or "bad", but because they have been made to satisfy different demands.

Maria Tymozoko's "Translation in Oral Tradition as a

Touchstone for Translation Theory and Practice" deals with the phenomenon of interlingual literary translation in oral cultures, and makes an attempt to reveal how cultural appropriation is operated via translation. Translation in oral tradition involves, according to Tymozoko, the adaptation of narrative to the poetics (oral aesthetic) and ideology of the target culture.

Mahasweta Sengupta is the author of "Translation, Colonialism and Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in Two Worlds". The central idea of this paper is translation as mimicry of the dominant discourse. Studying Tagore's auto-translations, Sengupta demonstrates that the poet wrote in a totally different style in English and Bengali, as he shaped his own translations according to the models of imperialist Europe.

Vladimir Macura's "Culture as Translation" shows, based on the Czech-German example, how one culture virtually "cloned" itself on the other during the 19th century. According to Macura, the function of translation has very little to do with the transfer of information from one language to another, as it has been so often claimed. As Macura points out to prove his argument, the Czech readers of the translations did not need it at all, as they were perfectly able to read the German originals. Through translation, a language – and consequently a nation – shows that it is capable of rendering what is rendered in more prestigious languages.

Elzbieta Tabakowska contributes with "Linguistic Polyphony as a Problem in Translation". Contrary to the idea that the source text is a monolithic production of one speaker which should therefore be translated in the same monolithic manner, Tabakowska demonstrates the much larger extent to which culture shows in both, text and translation.

Mary Snell-Hornby's "Linguistic Transcending or Cultural Transfer? A Critique of Translation Theory in Germany" argues that neither the word, nor the text, but the culture must be the operational "unit" of translation, an idea which has become known as the "cultural turn" in Translation Studies, a concept that permeates all papers in this book.

Barbara Godard presents "Theorizing Feminist Discourse/ Translation", in which she deals with the category of power as a constraint on the production of translations, as

documented by how feminist writing uses translation to subvert dominant male discourse. The feminist writers she mentions manipulate with the aim of advancing their own ideology.

Dirk Delabastita's "Translation and the Mass Media" focuses on the various forms of translation taking place in the international world of audio-visual communication and attempts to set up the framework of a unified perspective and approach to further research into film. The author argues that according to such a perspective, it is impossible to think that a researcher can study (film) translation in isolation from the cultural contexts in which it is practised.

Sherry Simon makes her contribution with "Translation the Will to Knowledge: Prefaces and Canadian Literary Politics", the core of which is the idea that translations are made to respond to the demands of a culture, and of various groups within a culture. Analyzing French/English translation prefaces in Quebec, Canada, the author claims that these have taken on very specific roles, evidencing the different ideological interests of these two groups.

Piotr Kuhiwczak's "Translation as Appropriation: The Case of Milan Kundera's *The Joke*" also sees translation as the manipulation of the source text to make it serve a certain purpose. The translators he mentions manipulate mainly to protect the reader not from an ideology, but from a poetics, as exemplified by the simplification of Kundera's *The Joke*, which had to be made more to read like an average reader is used to.

This book succeeds in providing an overview of the state-of-the-art in translation, showing how the authors tackle the problem of ideology, change and power in literature and society, thus making evident the central function of translation as a shaping force. It should be pointed out, however, that some essays, like Snell-Hornby's, are the keystones around which the works of minor importance find support.

Although this is clearly a book not intended for beginners, its reading is strongly recommended for those who have already been exposed to at least the most basic concepts – many of which will be ruled out – of the exciting field of Translation Studies.

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