
Susan Petrilli (ed.). *Translation Translation*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2003, 660 pp.

Translation Translation, compiled and edited by Susan Petrilli, is a collection of thirty-six articles offering an interdisciplinary approach to the topic of translation, moving beyond simply the disciplines of literary criticism, linguistics, and semiotics to include areas such as philosophy, social sciences, biology, and the medical sciences. Contributing authors were invited to address the issue of translation as it relates to their own areas of expertise and interest. Articles were contributed by well known scholars, researchers

and authors from around the world, including Eugene A. Nida, Thomas A. Sebeok, Ubaldo Steconi and Terry Threadgold. All contributors recognize the importance of translation in meeting new and emerging community needs as well as in the international context of globalization. Petrilli, Associate Professor of Semiotics at the University of Bari, Italy, author and editor of several other works on the topic, and a prolific translator herself, hopes to contribute further to translation with this interdisciplinary volume.

This work begins with a preface by Augusto Ponzio and an introduction to translation and semiosis by Petrilli. The volume is then divided into the following nine sections: "Translation Theories and Practices," "Peircean

Semiotics from the Viewpoint of Translation,” “Translation from the Viewpoint of Peircean Semiotics,” “Intersemiotic and Intersemiotic Translation,” “Biotranslation,” “Translation between Organic and Inorganic,” “Translation and Cultural Transfer,” “Translation, Literary Writing and Multimedial Communication,” and “Translation, Otherness, Foreignization.”

In this book, Petrilli intends to go beyond the traditional, limited perception of translation as the relationships between various historical-natural languages. Each individual historical-natural language contains its own unique plurilingualism, or a plurality of languages that relate to each other through processes of translation. Translation also exists between verbal and nonverbal languages as well as among different nonverbal languages. As such, translation simply cannot be constrained to the realm of linguistics but also inevitably involves the science and theory of signs, or semiotics. The editor argues that the act of translation “is to interpret,” and thus occurs wherever signs exist. If this is the case, she contends, then translation must be understood as concerning more than just the hu-

man world, and that translative processes permeate the entire living world and biosphere. Thus translation does not only belong to the sphere of anthroposemiosis, but also extends to the area of biosemiotics.

Petrilli distinguishes between several types of translation, and discusses these using the terminology proposed by Roman Jakobson: intralingual translation (the interpretation of verbal signs by means of other verbal signs belonging to the same historical-natural language); interlingual translation (the interpretation of verbal signs from one historical-natural language by means of verbal signs from another historical-natural language); and intersemiotic translation (the interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal signs and vice versa, as well as nonverbal signs from one sign system with nonverbal signs of a different sign system). Using these ideas, Petrilli expands her discussion of translation and introduces several new terms and ideas. In the introduction, Petrilli also provides a visual schema to facilitate an understanding of the established terminological apparatus used throughout the volume. This figure pro-

vides definitions of each term and illustrates its place within the schema, thus providing a very useful reference for the reader.

Another point of focus in this book is the relationship between author and translator and original and translated text. Petrilli argues that in these relationships, the authorial voice of the translator is erased or made transparent in such a way that it is the voice of original author that reaches the audience. Petrilli refers to the translator as another mask worn by the author, a mask “of a faithful mouthpiece that neither critically interprets, nor analyzes, nor discusses, nor takes a stand, but simply reports faithfully”. The translator, according to the editor, is merely reporting the words of the original author, and interpreting them so as to be understood by a new audience. In this way, a translation may be deemed an example of indirect discourse. For Petrilli, the main processes at work in translation are interpretive and explanatory, and do not take a critical position with regard to the text.

In terms of the relationships between the texts, Petrilli states that the overall configuration of the translation-text is influenced in its attempt to reach the forms

of adequacy that characterize the original-text. In order to be an adequate translation, the translation-text relates to the original-text by means of an answering comprehension, and not simply by repeating the original. Petrilli also warns translators to avoid the temptation of surrendering to learned aesthetic rules, especially with regard to the urge to simplify (something she calls the “synonymization reflex”) when translating a work with repetition or long passages. She makes her case with the powerful statement: “If rather than transgress the text the translator/interpreter aims at establishing an effective dialogic otherness relationship with it, a necessary condition is posited for competent and creative translation.”

Petrilli’s final argument in her introduction concerns the issue of translatability. She affirms that “to translate... is always possible”. She attributes this to the existence of a “common speech,” or the understanding that the relationship between the original-text and the translation-text is one of homology and not isomorphism or superficial analogy. As such, a reformulation of what has been said is always possible, whether within or between different languages,

and that, thanks to “common speech,” translatability is inherent in anything verbal. Included here is the understanding that the translation of a text remains open, and can be translated indefinitely.

The various sections of the book following Petrilli’s introduction expand on her points and arguments. Detailed discussions involving translation theory, cultural translation, translation among and between the human and biological spheres, and the study of translation as it relates to semiotics comprise the majority of this volume. This book is an indispensable resource for the serious translator and translation stu-

dent, though its advanced level may preclude its usefulness to students at the introductory level. The various articles illustrate how and where translation is present in everyday life and the world around us. As Susan Petrilli states at the opening of the book: “To translate is not to decodify, nor to decipher, but to interpret. Therefore, translation theory should be grounded in sign theory, and, precisely, semiotics of interpretation. To this end...translation... may be further developed and extended to semiosis in its entirety, to the biosphere, and not simply limited to the human world.”

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