

The Respondent Responds

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I had considered delaying my response until the end of the colloquium but such is the volume of information that it seemed wise to make an early provisional response before data overload led to amnesia.

In the two position papers and my response the focus has largely been to date on the translator. The debate opened up by the colloquium has focused on *a*) the translator as (disaggregated) agent and *b*) the notion of intercultural. If we conceive of the translator as a person inhabiting an intercultural space it is important that due account be taken of the risks and difficulties that such a position implies.

André Makine in *Le testament français* describes the return of the Russian protagonist to the town in the steppes where his French-born grandmother lives. The young man is full of resentment at the French elements in his identity which he feels isolate him from his Russian peers, «Je voulais qu'elle s'explique, qu'elle se justifie. Car c'est elle qui m'avait transmis cette sensibilité française —la sienne—, me condamnant à vivre dans un pénible entre-deux-mondes». The notion of difficulty, risk emerges in a different though related context in an article by Daniel Simeoni that I mentioned in my initial response, «Translating and Studying Translation: the View from the Agent» where he argues that «the translating agent straddles the borderline bet-

ween cultures. Although various pressures associated with practice force him/her to “stay home” —on the target side— s/he cannot afford to ignore the source field a long time without being at risk».

Translation is a profoundly paradoxical operation. In order to respect the integrity of the source text the translator is duty-bound to have as full an understanding as possible of the source text, an understanding that is at least comparable to that of a competent (in the domain) native speaker of the language. I say at least because in many instances due to poor formulation the translator has to be even more sensitive or ingenious than the native speaker to arrive at a suitable basis for transferable meaning and this applies as much to promotional material for trade fairs as it does to poetry. Thus, effective understanding requires extensive travelling into the other culture, regular contact, often long periods of residence. Travel must not however become exile. Translation only makes sense if Ithaca is in sight, if there is homecoming in the target language. Translators must be alive to the full emotional, cognitive and referential range of their mother tongue. The danger for the translator as Descartes warns in the *Discours de la méthode* is that «lorsqu' on emploie trop de temps à voyager on devient enfin étranger en son pays». The translator must become the Other

while remaining the One (one here is used oppositionally rather than essentially). There must be proximity without fusion, distance without remoteness. The translator must embrace the analog mode of both/and rather than the digital mode of either/or. The terms are taken from Anthony Wilden's 1980 work *System and Structure* which still has a great deal to teach us in case people mistakenly think that I have somehow consigned structural or systemic thinking to the ash-can of history through some misguided chronological snobbery. This intrinsic paradox of translation, being simultaneously a and not-a, can be intolerable. In Gregory Bateson's terms, translation can be a double bind where the contradictory demands generated by the two languages lead to considerable stress as the translators find that they are unable to satisfy either demand. They are trapped in no man's land with no homes to go to. This is why in my current work-in-progress I am particularly interested in the Translator as Nomad. There is further the critique of essentialist notions of identity that underlies translation. In Henri Meschonnic's words, «La traduction est cette activité qui permet mieux qu'aucune autre, puisque son lieu n'est pas un terme mais la relation elle-même, de reconnaître une altérité dans une identité». The critique usually takes the form of celebration as translation is seen as the enemy of the sectarian hatred that finds solace in reified notions of identity. It must not be forgotten, however, that the psychic investment in identity is enormous and that fragmenting, destabilising, undermining fixed identities can often generate resentment and resistance. The experience of *étrangeté* or *unheimlichkeit* in translation may correspond to a post-modern delight in the relative but the experience is nonetheless unsettling. This means, in effect, that translation schools must resist a pressure related to specificity. The specificity of translator training is often defended

post hoc, ergo propter hoc, i.e. students must already possess a very good command of their source and target languages before we teach them translation. Therefore, translator training is a separate enterprise from language teaching. It assumes language rather than teaches it. I would defend the specificity differently arguing that the paradoxical and analog nature of the *entre-deux* of translation means that it is radically dissimilar from the either/or world of the language learner. This is not to say that the dichotomies are so distinct in language learning that there are not elements of interculture and interlanguage in the language learning experience but my contact with students over the years has taught me that there are excellent linguists that turn out to be woeful translators. They can function very well in the foreign language or in their own language but the major problem is that in-between space, the analog continuum of translation.

The debates around Anthony Pym's transaction costs theory still fail to address the argument advanced in my response, i.e. who defines «satisfactory cooperation» in asymmetrical situations. The long-term benefits of cooperation for the linguistically dominant are a function of their power. They may tolerate translation for the sake of linguistic/political peace but the stronger the language, the more attractive assimilation is over a cooperation that makes any concession to difference. The problem is related at a fundamental level to the debate about «l'Europe des patries». A Europe without Frontiers can be a multicultural love-in or a monoglossic camp. As Pascal Bruckner pointed out in *Le vertige de Babel* (1994) «La grande saveur des frontières, une fois reconnues et garanties, c'est qu'on peut les franchir, jouer à leurs marges, exercer autrement plus exaltant que leur abolition pure et simple. Seuls les conquérants rêvent d'effacer les frontières, surtout celle des autres». I am not

always convinced that the liberatory discourse of post-nationalism will deliver on processes of harmonious and mutually beneficial integration. It could instead feed one (French/English/German) form of linguistic ethnocentrism that posits itself as supra-ethnic and that the ensuing 'cooperation' will be more the submission of the vanquished rather than a joyful embrace of the superior logic of language convenience. Again to quote Bruckner, «Aller vers les autres implique donc une patrie, une mémoire qu'il faut cultiver (même si on les relativise): je n'accorde l'hospitalité à l'étranger qu'à partir d'un sol où je peux l'accueillir».

The practice/theory debate seems to be the TS equivalent of Banquo's ghost that haunts every single discussion that takes place in translation theory. It is one of the most dispiriting debates I know because the terms of the debate are almost invariably the same: theoreticians have nothing to offer to practitioners or theoreticians have lots to offer practitioners. There seems to be a recurrent confusion about the aims or purposes of theory. Some theoreticians do have practical/prescriptive/didactic purposes and they say so (Newmark/Hervey/Higgins etc.). The purpose of other theoreticians is to study what translation tells us about how we know the world, language, culture. Its purposes are not to tell translators what to do but to use translation as a form of epistemological or ontological enquiry. No amount of literary criticism will tell you how to write a good novel but good

literary criticism can in Kermode's words allow us to make sense of how others make sense of the world. A further function of theory is to consider gender, class, race dimensions to translation and though they will draw inductively on translation experience again the purpose is not to teach anyone how to translate. The endless theory/practice debates seem to go nowhere in particular and are generally based on a misapprehension of purpose.

The debate as to whether TS is a distinct academic field is interesting and I suspect it will run and run. However, I must admit to being less concerned about the survival of TS as a discipline than I am about its seeming peripherality to many debates in other disciplines. We talk among ourselves which is a good thing but do we do much talking to others? It is striking that in the course of the present colloquium, ideas have been imported from sociology (Daniel Simeoni), economics (Anthony Pym), cognitive psychology (Doug Robinson) but how many ideas from translation studies have been imported into these disciplines? I am still astonished to see the extent to which areas of study like anthropology, ethnography, travel literature, literary historical studies, political science, history of science remain largely unaware of the insights of translation theory. The discipline would appear to be absolutely central to an understanding of (post)modernity but yet apart from our own busy corner I wonder whether anybody out there is listening?