Document généré le 30 mai 2024 02:52

Meta
Journal des traducteurs
Translators' Journal

META

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Volume 35, numéro 2, juin 1990

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/003675ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/003675ar

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Éditeur(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (imprimé)
1492-1421 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Mossop, B. (1990). Translating Institutions and “Idiomatic” Translation. *Meta*, *35*(2), 342–355. https://doi.org/10.7202/003675ar

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TRANSLATING INSTITUTIONS AND "IDIOMATIC" TRANSLATION

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In this article, I will be considering the role of translating institutions (companies, governments, newspapers, churches, literary publishers) in determining how a translation is done — whether it will be relatively "literal" or relatively "free", whether the language will be idiomatic or innovative, whether there will be a change in level of language, and so forth. Attending to the role of the institution within which the translator works casts fresh light on certain questions and common assumptions about translation: What is a mistranslation? Is the defining characteristic of translation that it preserves meaning during a change of language? Is the function of translation to promote communication?

I will be particularly concerned with the notion that translations should be idiomatic. I will show why this approach to translation has arisen in an institutional setting with which I am familiar — the Canadian Government's translation service — and I will mention three disadvantages of the approach. Finally, I will briefly look at some theoretical implications of an "institutional" understanding of the translation process.

1. THE INSTITUTIONAL NATURE OF TRANSLATION

1.1 'BAD TRANSLATION' IN NEWSPAPERS

Consider the following passages from articles that have appeared in the Toronto *Globe and Mail* (my underlinings):

> (1) Yesterday, Mr. LaSalle denied accusations from callers that he is an opportunist, had taken part in *tractations* with Quebec Justice Minister Marc-André Bédard, and is running just to keep the PQ in power. (14 January 1981)
>
> (2) "This verdict came from a jury and, with all the publicity that surrounded this raid from the start, I feel this is a victory for democracy," Mr. Proulx said. "The 12 jurors listened to the *proof*, informed themselves of the facts and withstood a hail of emotion. I am very happy for my clients." (22 October 1984)
>
> (3) But the Quebec people "might not, for reasons many of which are *conjunctional*, want to take that step. I think we must respect that. *It's not, because* Quebeckers would not want to pronounce themselves on the sovereignty issue, *that* it (Quebec) is not a distinct society, or a people". (From a story on a speech by former Québec Justice Minister Pierre-Marc Johnson to a University of Toronto audience, date uncertain, punctuation as printed in *The Globe*)
>
> (4) His letter quotes Mrs Sauvé... as saying in one interview: "There were persons who had neither the capacity nor the willingness to adapt to change. We therefore had to *depart ourselves of them*". (19 December 1980)

Government and business translators will almost automatically reject certain aspects of (1)-(4). Either the journalist does not know how to translate, it will be said, or, if the words of a Francophone speaking English are being reported, the journalist or editor failed to correct the language so as to render the intended meaning. The reasons for rejection would include:

(a) non-existent words (*tractations* in (1) — despite the quotation marks around the word, the significance of which is quite unclear);
(b) words which exist but are nonsensical as used (*conjunctional* in (3));
(c) "*faux amis*" (*proof* in (2) — a faux ami of French *preuve*; *depart* in (4) — a faux ami of French *départir*);
(d) direct renderings of French syntax (*It's not because... that* in (3)).

Translators will reject these translations not simply because they give rise to individual problems of understanding but because they are instantly identified as a *type* of translation that is unacceptable. "Idiomatic" translation is now so established as the correct way to translate in government and business, and in schools of translation, that it appears to be natural. We see other ways of translating as the products of unenlightened minds. When in the course of translating I come across *ce n'est pas parce que... que*, I reject the English structure *it's not because... that* almost without thinking, because it rarely turns out to be idiomatic[1].

Before continuing, I should briefly explain what I mean by the term "idiomatic". I will be using this term in a sense that goes beyond the usual notion that a translation is idiomatic if, out of all the word combinations which are grammatically allowable in the target language, the translation uses only ones which are in fact habitually employed. Thus in translating *Des consignes pour l'évacuation du personnel doivent être établies et des exercices régulièrement effectués* (in an article on fire prevention), it would be unidiomatic — though perfectly grammatical and I think understandable — to write *fire exercises*. The idiomatic expression is *fire drills*. By an extension of this usual sense of idiomaticity, one can also speak of idiomatic choices of syntactic structure, as when a French active construction is rendered by an English passive (*Cela permet d'évacuer rapidement le personnel* becomes *In this way staff can be evacuated quickly*). I will also speak of unidiomatic (i.e. innovative) uses of individual words (such as *proof* in the sense of "evidence" in (2) above). Finally, I will be using "idiomatic" to cover translations which convey the message of the source text the way a target-language writer would convey it, without special regard to the way in which it is conveyed in the source text (through particular word choices and syntactic structures). Thus an idiomatic rendering of *chien méchant* on a lawn sign would be *beware of dog*, not *nasty dog*, even though the latter is idiomatic in the usual narrower sense of idiomaticity: one can say "that's a nasty dog you have", but this doesn't happen to be the expression used on lawn warning signs. For the purposes of this article, the distinction between a translation which is idiomatic only in the narrower usual sense and one which is also idiomatic in the broader sense is irrelevant, and so I have not used two separate terms; Newmark (1981, ch. 3) calls translations like *beware of dog* "communicative".

There is in fact nothing natural about idiomatic translation. We tend to see as natural that mode of translation which has been selected by the institution within which we work. Much is said these days about translation as a form of communication between source-text author and translation reader, and about the need to adapt the translation to the reader. But translation is not simply a form of communication between *individuals*. When I translate a text, it is not simply me personally conveying to a reader what someone else wrote in French. It must be borne in mind that all translation takes place in an institutional context — as do other forms of writing (Williams, 1981, ch. 2). As we will see, decisions like whether to change the level of language are not made simply by looking at the genre of the text, or at who the readers of the translation will be. Rather, such decisions are to a great extent pre-determined by the goals of the institution within which the translator works.

When confronted with translations where the wrong decisions seem to have been made (the journalistic examples given above), we can learn much if we forego prescription ("This is bad translation; here is how it should have been done"), and instead ask *why* the material was translated the way it was. In some cases it will be adequate simply to answer that the translator was careless or unqualified, or was not given enough time, or had inadequate documentation. But often it will be necessary to look deeper if we want a satisfactory answer.

In the case of "bad" journalistic translation, it is of course true that, generally speaking, journalist-translators have no training in translation. But *why* do they have no training? The answer is that, unlike certain other employers, newspaper publishers do not think their goals will be advanced if they require or perhaps pay for such training. To understand why this should be, it is first necessary to see that in our society, the news-reporting, news-analyzing and language-regulating functions of daily papers (unlike certain more specialized publications) are now less important than the advertising function and the ideological function (calling on the reader to "defend the West" or "oppose Terrorism and Drugs" or "support the Family"). In earlier times, language quality had to be higher because the articles had an important informative and analytical function and were more central than the pictures, headlines and ads.

Given the functions of daily papers, even bad writing serves the purpose: it fills up the space between ads with something that is vaguely intelligible, gives the reader something to pass the time with on the bus going to work, and is easy for the journalist to produce quickly[2]. Bad journalistic translation is part of a larger carelessness in journalistic writing today that involves everything from punctuation, spelling, word choice and sentence structure to background research and the presentation of a coherent narrative or argument.

Before we leave the question of journalistic translation, it should be said that not all of what we professional translators would identify as bad translation in newspapers really is bad, in the sense of creating misunderstanding. Some of it merely offends the doctrine of idiomatic translation. For instance, one can argue that translated quotations *should* sometimes sound odd (i.e. unidiomatic). If the doctrine of idiomatic translation is followed rigidly, then the translated comments of, say, the Premier of Quebec will always sound as if they had been uttered by the Premier of an English-speaking province, and this may be undesirable (see section 3 for an example).

1.2 MIS(?)TRANSLATING FREUD

Let us now turn to another type of translation. Recently Bruno Bettelheim complained that the standard English translation of the writings of Freud errs in substituting Greco-Latin "scientific" words for Freud's everyday German (which Bettelheim says is a sign of literary-humanist as opposed to scientific writing). Why, he asks (Bettelheim, 1984, p. 53), is *das Es* rendered as *the Id* rather than *the It* (*es* being the singular neuter third-person pronoun)? Why is the same approach not used here as in the standard French translation *le Ça*?

For the sake of argument, let us assume that Bettelheim's interpretation of Freud's writing as humanist rather than scientific is correct. Do we then have a case of mistranslation — an error in level of language? The answer depends on how we understand the role of translation. One common understanding nowadays is that translation preserves meaning, although there are certain necessary adaptations to the readership, and since not *all* aspects of meaning can be preserved, the relevant aspect(s) must be selected (for example, a metaphor may have to be eliminated in order to preserve cognitive meaning). In this view, *the Id* is a mistranslation because there is no *need* to change level of language in this case: it could be preserved in English just as it has been in French.

However in the "institutional" understanding of translation, translations are seen as preserving meaning *within the limitations of institutional purpose.* Only within these limitations do faithfulness to the source-text and adaptation to specific readers and to the target culture in general play a role. From the point of view of the translating institution, the "unnecessary" changes in meaning are as important as the preserved meaning, and sometimes more important.

I suspect that Freud's translator clearly perceived that Freud could have selected German words of Greco-Latin origin (which certainly existed in scientific German), and that therefore the selection of everyday German words was significant. But Freudians in the English-speaking world were consciously trying to construct a "science of psychoanalysis", and therefore they needed a translation that sounded scientific. If Freud was in fact a literary humanist, that was simply irrelevant to their purposes.

Some might wonder whether the level-of-language change was simply a necessary adaptation to the English-speaking readership of the time. This is certainly a possibility. Only a historical investigation could determine whether the translation would have been "unreceivable" in the English-speaking world without the change. However we should not assume this to be the case. If we follow the institutional approach to translation advocated here, the assumption will be that either a "literary" or "scientific" translation would have been receivable (though perhaps by different audiences), and that a conscious choice was made.

I am suggesting, then, that translation transforms meaning not merely in the sense of adaptation to certain target-language readers but in the sense of making the translation serve the purpose of the translating institution. *Translations change meaning even when* — given sufficient training, documentation, time and care — *it could be preserved.* Most writing about translation assumes that the important question to ask about source-text and translation is how they are similar. But perhaps more light could be shed on translation if attention were turned to the question of why translations *differ* from their sources.

The Freud case also shows that translation equivalents do not exist until translators create them and they come to be accepted in the target language. There was no "natural" equivalent for *das Es*, waiting to be found by documentary research. The translator had to pick *the Id* from a range of possibilities, and as this choice became known among English-speaking readers, the equivalence *Es* = *Id* came into being.

Of course, once a particular way of translating has been institutionalized (and perhaps taught in translation schools), then the answer to questions about how to translate may seem to be a merely technical matter. Translating psychoanalytic texts is now just a matter of either common knowledge or terminological / documentary research. A translation instructor will be technically correct in calling *the It* a mistranslation of *das Es*, but a good teacher will point out that it is an error because it does not conform to an original institutional decision. As for Bettelheim's view that *the Id* is a mistranslation, I think it is wrong to apply the term "mistranslation" without taking institutional purpose into account. Bettelheim refers to this purpose (creating a "science of psychoanalysis"; Bettelheim, 1984, p. 32) but appears to deem it irrelevant to the question of what constitutes mistranslation. His argument seems to be that changing the level of language is by definition mistranslation.

1.3 THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF TRANSLATION

Calling *the Id* a mistranslation is problematic because it suggests, counterfactually, that translating is an activity that could somehow be carried on "uncontaminated" by the goals of the translating institution. In fact it cannot. But that does not mean there is no judgment to be made about the translation of Freud. What has to be judged are the institutional goals themselves.

Was it a good thing to create a "science of psychoanalysis", rather than present Freud as a guide to human self-knowledge, as Bettelheim urges? Whose interest did this serve? These are questions of an ethical and political nature, and translators cannot avoid them on the ground that they are performing a merely technical service. The changes they make in meaning may or may not be a good thing.

Bible translation is an area in which there has been a certain amount of ethical and political debate. There is no general agreement about how the Bible should be translated. In a critique of Eugene Nida's approach, Meschonnic (1973, p. 328ff) suggests that as one strips away the original Biblical metaphors and the references to Jewish and early Christian cultures, the Bible ceases to be a literary/cultural/theological text and is reduced to a set of moral lessons. Prickett (1979, p. 263) responds to the preface of the *Good News Bible* ("every effort has been made to use language that is natural, clear, simple and unambiguous") by saying that "religion is *not about* things that are natural, clear, simple and unambiguous". The decision to be "clear and simple" is an institutional decision dictated by certain goals. A "simple" style can in reality be a simpl*ifying* style that eliminates real complexities and propagandistically presents matters in black-and-white terms.

Bible-translating institutions appear to have adopted the solution of translating in different ways for different audiences: one way for theologians, one way for 'First World' readers who still prize the Bible as part of a literary heritage, and one way for those in the Third World who are the targets of evangelizing efforts. A political and an ethical question arise when such a decision is made. If the institutional goal is, for instance, to take a certain version of American Protestant morality to the Third World (as Meschonnic suggests in the case of Nida's approach: 1973, p. 339, 348), then the poetic language, the historical context and even some of the theological content may appear irrelevant to the translator. But is this goal a worthy one? (the ethical question), and whose interest does it serve? (the political question). Clearly, a decision to preserve this or that aspect of meaning may serve the interest of some but not of others.

It is easy to dismiss the idea of a "politics of translation" by pointing to the fact that most professional translators are not concerned with translating things like Freud or the Bible. But consider the journalistic example alluded to at the end of section 1.1 — a type of text similar to those normally dealt with by government and business translators. If we can turn our attention away from the really egregious errors journalist-translators make, and look instead at the matter of how the comments of Quebec public figures sound in translation, then we can see that there is indeed a political aspect to the translation of texts dealt with routinely by translators. What a Quebec politician sounds like in translation will have some effect on how English-Canadian readers react to political issues involving French/English relations in Canada.

This point may be granted, but surely, it will be said, there is no "politics" to the translation of an accident report, or a memo on acid rain. The *topic* of such texts may have political ramifications, but surely the translation process itself is just a neutral matter of accuracy and readability. To demonstrate that this is not the case, I want now to look at the Government of Canada as a translating institution.

2. GOVERNMENT TRANSLATION IN CANADA

The federal government of Canada requires its translations to be idiomatic in the sense noted in section 1.1: translators are to avoid novel uses of words (except where innovation is unavoidable as a result of the specialized terminology of a text), and to render the "force" of the souce text rather than imitate its wording[3].

A very interesting example of what this means for the translator is described in an article entitled *Animation and animateur: a translator's nightmare* (Hutcheson &

Adshead 1983), which appeared in the federal Translation Bureau's bulletin *Terminology Update / Actualité terminologique* (a title which itself reflects the doctrine of idiomaticity[4]). The article demonstrates the need to use some fifteen different English words or expressions to convey common meanings of *animateur* (host, DJ, leader, facilitator, moderator, community worker) and another fifteen or so for *animation* (community development, chairing, motivation, group training, leadership).

Why, we may ask, can we not translate the verb *animer* and its derivatives by English *animate* and its derivatives? The answer, from the point of view of the doctrine of idiomatic translation, is that it would hinder communication because English *animation* has a much more restricted meaning than its French counterpart. According to this view, a unilingual anglophone will always take a sentence like *She animates the meetings* to mean *She makes the meetings lively*. In fact I think this is false. Given the right context it could be clear that the intended meaning is *She chairs the meetings*. It is simply a matter of introducing the new meaning in carefully chosen contexts. If the idiomatic theory were true, linguistic innovation would always create chaos in a language community, but clearly it does not.

I want now to look more closely at the concept of hindering (and promoting) communication. What I want to suggest is that it should be seen not in absolute terms but rather in terms of the hindering or promoting of institutional goals. "Animate a meeting" is ruled out in favour of "chair a meeting" not because the former hinders communication in any absolute sense but because it fails to achieve a purpose of the translating institution, in this case the Government of Canada.

Consider the context within which government translation between the official languages of Canada takes place. The federal government's approach has been inspired by the role of English-to-French translation. It has been pointed out (for example Juhel 1982, p. 55ff) that English is overwhelmingly the translat*ed* language in Canada, and French the translat*ing* language. Translation in Canada is a form of communication that goes mainly in one direction only. Given the fact that Quebeckers read so much translation as opposed to original French writing, it is argued that if the translations are not idiomatic, then the French language will cease to be an instrument of cultural identity and ultimately political survival.

Of course, one could equally well argue that *idiomatic* translation into French is a vehicle for introducing English-Canadian culture into Quebec, just as much as translation that employs anglicized French. After all, language and thought are not completely identical. It is often possible to express idiomatically some aspects of an alien way of thinking, which becomes more "receivable" precisely because *it is disguised as a target-language original.*[5] More importantly, while idiomatic translation may well perform such useful functions as making it easy for a Francophone to read income-tax instructions originally drafted in English, it also conveys the false impression that the federal tax department and taxation authorities are somehow "French". Idiomatic translation by its nature conjures up a certain image of the state which does not correspond to reality since, given the demographics of Canada, the federal public service and the federal law-making and regulatory agencies are, and are likely to remain, predominantly in the hands of Anglophones even if Francophones are represented in proportion to their numbers.

Much more has been said and could be said on the subject of English-to-French translation, but I would like now to turn to the question of the role of translation from French into English, a subject which to my knowledge has never received serious consideration in print.

The historical context of French-to-English translation at the federal level may be briefly summarized as follows (French-to-English translation in the Quebec public service

operates in a rather different context, which I will not be considering as I am not familiar with it). After 1960, with the "Quiet Revolution" in Quebec, the issue of the relationship between the French and English speaking peoples of Canada became a burning political question. Quebec became a big topic of interest in English Canada, and there was a demand for more literary and journalistic translation from French. Then, as large numbers of Francophones entered federal bilingual institutions, with the right to work in French, it became necessary to translate public-service materials (in particular those written in the Quebec regional offices of government departments) into English because so few Anglophone public servants had an adequate knowledge of the other official language — a situation which persists despite language training programs.

The bilingualization of the federal public service inevitably led to a resurgence of ancient English-Canadian fears of a "French take-over". Idiomatic translation is one small way of reducing these fears because it conceals the French origin of certain texts from unilingual Anglophone public servants (and also from the general public on those occasions when documents for the public are originally written in French).

More generally, translation from French conceals the "otherness" of French Canada because it operates as a substitute for language learning. In one way this is desirable since it allows Canadians entering all but a limited number of positions in the public service to work in their own language rather than having to learn another one. This benefit extends to the Francophone author of the source text, since he or she does not have to write in English in order to be understood by Anglophone colleagues. However communication between communities having different languages (that is, communication in the sense of "achieving mutual understanding" as opposed to merely "conveying information") is hindered when many people on one side have no understanding of the other group's language. It is difficult to appreciate the "otherness" of French Canada — except in sentimental "folkloric" terms — without a knowledge of French. This of course is because much of culture is expressed through the connotations that have accreted around words over the years and centuries; words of the target language have their own, different connotations.

If translation can hinder communication because it is a substitute for language learning, *idiomatic* translation makes things worse because, by its nature, it *completely* conceals the local or national identity of the source-text author — the fact of the author's belonging to another community. Thus an Anglophone public-service manager reading the translation of a memo on acid rain written by a Francophone manager gets only the administrative content of the source text. But such memos often convey, through their style, information about the author's identity. For example, in texts written in Quebec there is sometimes a certain chummy informality that is combined in varying degrees (and sometimes incongruously) with the elegant (not to say precious) formality associated with texts from France. All evidence of this will be lost in a fully idiomatic translation, since there is no English style that has the same historical and cultural resonance. The only way to convey this aspect of the meaning would be to avoid translating idiomatically, but this might make the memo "unreceivable" from an administrative point of view: the strange language might make the reader question the competence of the memo's originator.[6]

Even with the most purely factual memo, the Anglophone reader of an idiomatic translation will have the impression of being addressed by another Anglophone, despite the signature at the end. Of course, he or she will often know that the originator is from Quebec, but this knowledge will be somewhat abstract, especially if the reader has never met the author or lived in the author's home milieu. The reader's concrete experience will be that of being addressed by an English-sounding "voice". Idiomatic translation paradoxically makes the Francophone presence vanish.

The federal government's approach to translation reflects a liberal/cosmopolitan outlook that is often associated with the former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. In one common understanding of his thinking, the specificity and separateness of local and national communities are a thing of the past. What is important is that every individual be equal — in the Canadian context, equal regardless of mother tongue. Idiomatic translation is well suited to this purpose because it erases the "local colour" of the source text, leaving only the "universal" administrative or technical content. Unfortunately, since the language of any idiomatic translation is necessarily a local language (and not some truly universal translation-language made up of elements of all languages), the "universality" of the result takes a strange form: it appears to readers of translations that their language is the language of the whole world.

It must always be borne in mind that to speak about language in Canada (in this case, to speak about the idiomatic approach to translation) is almost never to speak *only* about language. In much the same way that political questions have often in history been discussed in religious terms, so today relations between the English and French speaking communities in Canada are often discussed indirectly, in the form of talk about language. Translation is not just about conveying information. It is also about relations between language communities. Translation from French to English makes possible a right to work in one's own language, but when it is idiomatic it conceals the Francophone presence from readers of the translations, and when it substitutes for language learning it hinders comprehension of the otherness of French Canada.

Am I arguing, then, that government translation should not be idiomatic? Quite the contrary. Idiomatic translation is an unfortunate necessity in a situation where translation is operating as a substitute rather than a supplement for language learning, and where English-Canadian antagonism toward French Canada might always boil over if there is suspicion that French is "infecting" English. It is true that the French immersion programs are packed, but I think it must be admitted that this is largely because certain parents see in it greater career opportunities for their children. It is also true that the proportion of Anglophones with a high level of French proficiency has increased, but this is mainly in the Montreal area; it accounts for only a very small fraction of the English-speaking population outside Quebec. Meanwhile the proportion of the population with *some* proficiency in French (i.e. excluding those with high proficiency) would appear to be stagnant or declining[7]. One result of this is the danger that outside Montreal any French-influenced innovations in English will be understood only by a small elite group.

The situation might be summed up by saying that if there was a greater openness to French Canada among English Canadians generally, and if that led to widespread learning of French, then one could be more confident about using *animation* in the "French" sense. In other words, certain types of unidiomatic translation would be receivable as a linguistic manifestation of a broader inter-community dialogue ranging far beyond the present tiny group of proficient bilinguals. It would not be necessary to completely disguise French texts as English ones via idiomatic translation. Instead, the existence of another community could be manifested in translated texts (and not just literary ones as at present) by departing from idiomaticity and conveying more of the resonances of the original wording than could otherwise be rendered.

Translators need to be aware of the advantages *and the disadvantages* of their institution's approach, and the historical situation that has given rise to that approach. Vague talk about "bridging the language solitudes" may make one feel good about what one is doing, but it is not the whole truth. The federal government's approach to translation both promotes *and hinders* communication.

3. SOME LIMITATIONS OF IDIOMATIC TRANSLATION

Idiomatic translation, we have seen, is a necessary feature of federal bilinguism in Canada today. This has at least three disadvantages, two of which have already been alluded to. First, as already suggested in the discussion of French *animer*, the requirement of idiomatic translation prevents translators from enriching Canadian English through careful introduction of "gallicism" (adding a word of greater generality than any existing English word in the case of *animer*). For more on this, and on the other two limitations discussed below, see Mossop (1988).

Second, in certain types of texts that are translated by the federal government, there are passages which ought not to be rendered idiomatically even in the present historical situation. Translators may well fail to even *consider* this possibility when the institution they work for promotes idiomatic translation as a universal ideal. An example is the translation of quotations, in cases where it is important to convey the personal style of the source-text author and follow his or her thought process (render the semantics of the individual source-text words rather than merely the force of what is said). Consider the following passage from former Premier René Lévesque's resignation letter, and one possible rendering of it:

Je vous saurais gré de transmettre pour moi au conseil national ce simple message : merci du fond du coeur, merci à vous comme à tous ceux et celles qui se reconnaîtront, et qui n'ont cessé depuis tant d'années de payer de leur personne et de leur portefeuille pour bâtir, enraciner, maintenir ce projet si sain et démocratique que nous avons dessiné ensemble pour notre peuple.	I would appreciate it if you could transmit for me to the National Council this simple message: thank you from the bottom of my heart, thanks to you and to all those, who will recognize themselves, and who have not stopped for so many years paying with their selves and with their pocketbooks in order to build, implant, maintain this project which is so healthy and democratic and which we have designed together for our people.

This unidiomatic translation is — with two small differences — the one published by the *Globe and Mail*[8]. Despite problems, its general approach is right for two reasons. First, most of the readers of the *Globe* would have heard Lévesque speaking English on television and would expect him to sound odd in English. Even though this is writing and not speech, a rendering which made him sound like the premier of an English-speaking province would clash with his television English. Second, this is something of a historical and biographical document, so rather than trying to find "equivalents", it is worth mimicking Lévesque's rhetoric (syntactic style, word choices, images), in order both to render his unique voice and to avoid any impression that the text originated in English Canada. There is of course the danger that this unidiomatic translation will not be taken seriously by target-language members: for such an approach to work, there has to be a certain "openness" on the part of the readers toward the source-language community. But I think that, on the whole, this is a case where the translation should **not** read like an original.

The third problem with the idiomatic approach is that it tends to encourage true mistranslation. The formula "translate ideas not words" directs the translator's attention too quickly away from the actual words of the source text. The translator is tempted to

read "through" the actual words to a meaning which may well make sense, but is in fact different from the message of the source text. This failure to "see" actual wordings can also affect revision. Consider section 6 (2) (a) of the Charter of Rights:

Every citizen of Canada and every person who has the status of a permanent resident of Canada has the right (a) to move to and take up residence in any province	*Tout citoyen canadien et toute personne ayant le statut de résident permanent au Canada ont le droit : (a) de se déplacer dans tout le pays et d' établir leur résidence dans toute province*

Whoever compared the French and English texts here forgot to ask whether it is possible to be in Canada without being in any province (understood to include the territories). Is having the right to *se déplacer dans tout le pays* the same as as the right to "move to any province"? The answer is no. Artificial islands (such as have been built by oil companies) could be located in the territorial waters of Canada yet be in no province (*cf.* Gautron 1984). It is very easy, once one's attention has been drawn away from the actual wording of a text, to overlook such possibilities. One thinks "Canada consists of ten provinces and two territories" and then the remainder of the translation or revision process rests on that (incorrect) thought. The dictionary meaning of the expression *dans tout le pays* vanishes from view, and with it the basis for grasping the different implications of the French and English texts.

4. TRANSLATING INSTITUTIONS AND TRANSLATION THEORY

I would like to conclude by pointing out some implications for translation theory of the institutional aspect of translation.

1. The existing literature on translation most often refers to the process of finding equivalents as if this were something done by the translator as an individual rather than the translator as an agent of an institution. The translation-theory concept of equivalence recognizes that all source-text meaning cannot be preserved: a decision about what is relevant must be made. But what needs to be added is that this decision ultimately rests on the purpose of the translation, and *that* is determined by the translating institution.
2. The existing literature often speaks of the process of adapting a source text to a target-language audience as if this were determined by the inherent nature of the text, or else the nature of the particular audience. In the view taken here, the goals of the translating institution constitute a distinct and perhaps ultimately more decisive factor in the adaptation process. A distinction must be made between adaptations that are necessary if the target audience is to understand, and adaptations that are necessary to achieving the institution's goals.

Toury (1985, p. 5) says that "translating should be conceived of, in principle, as initiated in and by the target culture, even in those (rare) cases where, in factual terms, the first impulse for translating originates in the source language culture". He is right that translation theory should focus on "the functions a translation is designed to fulfil in the target culture", but surely he is factually wrong to say that it is rare for a source-language institution to provide the first impulse (as it seeks to export its texts). And it is not just a matter of the first impulse: the functions the translation is designed to fulfil can be determined within a source-language institution, or a bilingual institution that is dominated by source-language members. In this regard, it might be of interest to look at the Quebec Government as a source-language institution with respect to the French-to-English translations it produces.

3. The translation literature often refers to the constraints on adaptation imposed by the target culture as if this culture were monolithic. In fact, societies have a mainstream culture and a number of subordinate cultures (Williams 1981, ch. 7). The translating institution is not a part of "the" target (or "the" source) culture. Rather, in its approach to language-preservation and development, selection of texts for translation and other matters, it is responsive in varying degrees to the real or perceived needs of the different cultures that make up the society.
4. The concept of "the reader" needs to be concretized. The translation literature recognizes that translations are addressed to specific audiences, but says little about what these audiences do as they read the translation. Readers construct in their mind a picture of the "voice" that is addressing them as they read a translation (Mossop 1987), and this affects the image and authority of the institution in cases where the institution is the named author (e.g. a manufacturer translating a user manual), or the source-text author is identified as belonging to the institution (e.g. a government researcher), or the readers are aware of the institution as they read the translation (e.g. translations appearing in newspapers). Furthermore, the institution's success in achieving its translation goals may depend in part on whether it takes into account different types of reader. Aside from differences that arise from a reader's social identity (age, occupation, education, knowledge, etc.), there are also differences between those who do not know the source language and those who do (and can therefore recognize the origin of SL-influenced expressions); those who know they are reading a translation and those who don't; those who are reading translations *into* their mother-tongue and those who are reading translations *from* their mother-tongue, and so forth.
5. In recent years, translation theory has ceased to be exclusively concerned with linguistic or stylistic matters and has taken a definite sociolinguistic turn. However the social analysis has in general been too simple and abstract. For instance, Pergnier (1980, p. 27) writes:

> *Une approche théorique de la traduction doit donc en premier lieu, pensons-nous, faire porter l'accent sur la définition de ce qui est à traduire, c'est-à-dire sur le message, et sur ses rapports avec ce qui le médiatise, c'est-à-dire les deux langues dans lesquelles il est énoncé. C'est autour de cet axe central que doit, pensons-nous, s'organiser la problématique de la traduction. Seul, en effet, vise à rester constant dans le changement de langue qui constitue la traduction, le message en tant que contenu d'information. Toutes les autres composantes de l'opération (langues, émetteur, récepteur...) sont remplacées, et cela en fonction d'un seul but : la reformulation du message. Il nous semble donc nécessaire de déplacer le centre de gravité des problèmes théoriques de la traduction, des considérations sur la langue vers les considérations sur le message.*

Pergnier is right to take the focus away from purely linguistic matters in translation theory, but his formulation of a new focus is questionable in two ways. It defines the message as that which the translator aims to leave unchanged, and his discussion of the message (*ibid*, p. 50ff) is too abstract.

On the first of these points, he mentions (p. 62-3) the case of translating a kitchen appliance instruction manual from English into French and rightly states that to preserve the message it is necessary for the translator to keep in mind the difference between homemakers in France and the United States. This is fine as far as it goes, but it leaves out the whole important matter of the ways in which translations do not, and may not even be intended to, leave meaning unchanged. Pergnier writes (p. 47):

> *Il n'est pas douteux que toute traduction vise l'équivalence, au niveau du contenu informatif, d'un texte traduit avec un texte original.*

I think this is simply false, unless equivalence is understood in a sense so broad as to be useless as a theoretical concept. What *some* translators *aim* to do or *think* they are doing when they translate is not a sound basis for translation theory.

In his discussion of the message, Pergnier keeps referring to an entity called "*l'émetteur*" (the sender of the message). In the case of a translation, the sender seems to be simply the translator. In referring to the sender/translator as an individual, without reference to the institutional setting within which the translator operates, Pergnier follows the practice of many sociolinguists of not being sufficiently *social* in their approach.

In my view, translation theory should be considered not a branch of sociolinguistics (at least as presently conceived), but a branch of cultural history, and specifically the history of communications (conceived as an aspect of culture rather than merely an aspect of technology). This is not to deny that an essential aspect of translation theory is the consideration of such concepts as "sameness of meaning", "mode of translation" (literal, semantic, idiomatic, etc.), "unit of translation" (and other concepts related to the psychological process of translation) and "mode of re-writing" (paraphrase, summary, translation, quotation, report, etc.). But to my mind the "*problématique*" of translation theory — the central question it should be trying to answer — is why texts get translated in the way they do, why particular modes of translation are used. This is a historical question which can never be answered with reference only to linguistic and abstract sociolinguistic concepts.

Pergnier's statement of the fundamental problem of translation theory is typical of much current thinking in the field in that it is too much tied up with a pedagogical purpose: his aim in theorizing is to improve the teaching of idiomatic translation (hence the concern with the message as opposed to purely linguistic matters). In my view, translation theory should be kept distinct from applied translation studies. Thus I do not agree with Newmark's contention (1981, p. 19) that "translation theory's main concern is to determine appropriate translation methods for the widest possible range of texts or text-categories". That is an *application* of translation theory.

CONCLUSION

To sum up: for the purposes of a general translation theory, a sociological framework that sees an unchanged message moving from an individual translator to a set of identical readers in a monolithic culture is just too simple. It is now necessary to move beyond socially empty abstractions, like "the reader", "the target culture" and "the translator", to more concrete approaches that consider the historical (and conflictual) situations in which translations are done and read, with attention to institutions and to the various social groups whose interests are served or not served by those institutions. Only in this way will it be possible to understand why translations have been done and are being done in the way they are rather than in some other way. Students of literary translation have already made some progress in this direction (Hermans 1985[9]). Now it is necessary for those of us who are primarily concerned with other types of text to do the same.

NOTES

1. There exists an idiomatic structure that appears in "I like him but it's not because he's always giving me presents", but this is quite different from the structure of "It's not because he's always giving me presents that I like him". The latter is grammatical, but unidiomatic, or at any rate very awkward. Certainly this is a much less common construction than French *ce n'est pas parce que... que*.
2. For instance, in reporting the death of a noted figure Mr. X, the journalist can simply string together current buzzwords and sentimental clichés ("Mr. X became a *world-class* musician, but the *bottom line* for him was always *his family*. The *nation mourns his loss*"). The latter expression illustrates the ideological function

well: it does not inform us of anything but calls on us to join the mourning if we are true members of the nation. The first sentence shows how a buzzword of business origin ("bottom line") can be fitted incongruously into a non-business context. The way journalists string disparate prefabricated phrases together is not without similarity to the way literal-minded translators render small units one after the other without regard to the overall flow and effect.

3. The federal government's "translation doctrine" states that one should render "not the words or the structures of the source-text but rather the message or, in other words, the author's intention" (Translation Bureau, 1984, p. 3). This publication, prepared for the government's freelance translators, is based on a 1978 document with the interesting institution-oriented title *La traduction au service de l'État et du pays*. The English version of a further document ("Reviser's Handbook", 1985, pp. 1-4) says that one should render "not just words but ideas, so as to convey the message clearly, without keeping slavishly to the expressions and structures chosen by the author". The formulations "not *just* words but ideas" and "without keeping *slavishly*" (my underlinings) reflect differences of opinion regarding the degree to which the source-text author's wording must be respected. On balance, though, the statement comes down on the side of the modern doctrine of translating not words but ideas.
4. This publication originally had only a French title. A translation which followed the semantics of the French words would have been "current work in terminology". "Terminology update" renders the idea but not the semantics. Note that there are not just two possibilities — conveying the force of the original on the one hand, as in "terminology update", or being literal on the other (that is giving the principal meaning of each word without regard to context: "terminological current events"). For more on translations that render the semantics of the source-text, see Newmark 1981, chapters 3 and 5.
5. Perhaps the most important aspect of the government's translation doctrine is that translations are to be "authentic": "Authenticity is the impression conveyed by a translation that it is not, in fact, a translation, that it was composed in the target language from the outset, that it is an original piece of writing." (Translation Bureau, 1984, p. 6).
6. French-to-English translation of scientific texts poses a similar problem. French texts, especially those written in Europe, tend to have a literary rhetoric which, if it were imitated in English, would make the result sound completely unscientific, since scientific English today (unlike in Darwin's time) is written in a very spartan style. Scientific translation from French has to be exclusively concerned with the cognitive content, and anecdotal and rhetorical flourishes must be omitted, even though they probably convey something about the people who work within scientific institutions in France. It might be mentioned in passing that machine translation of scientific texts is of interest with respect to the politics and ethics of translation and its supposed role of promoting communication. Machine translation certainly does make scientific information available, but it should not be forgotten that essentially it began as a Cold War project to assist with military goals. In the United States, the translating institutions were research establishments funded by the Armed Forces. Such machine translation work may have promoted communication in the technical sense, but it did not have much to do with promoting communication in the sense of international understanding.
7. According to the 1985 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages:
(a) French immersion enrolment jumped from 38,000 in 1977-78 to 178,000 in 1985-86, but even the second figure is only 4.2% of the 4,205,000 elementary and secondary students. (p. 228)
(b) While participation in second-language classes at the elementary level increased from 31.6% in 1970-71 to 47.2% in 1985-86, participation at the secondary level dropped from 67.8% to 55%, and this decline is almost all attributable to English Canada (in Quebec, participation at the secondary level decreased only marginally, from 100% to 98%). (pp. 225-6)
(c) Between 1971 and 1981, the percentage of self-reported bilinguals outside Quebec rose from 3.5% to 5.3% among those of English mother-tongue in all age groups (but only from 6.8% to 7.6% among those aged 15 to 24). While the former figure represents a big increase, the important thing is that we are once again talking about only a very small fraction of the population. Inside Quebec, bilingualism among the English mother-tongue group rose from 36.7% to 53.4%. (p. 166)
Interpretation of the Census results, on which these figures are based, is difficult since people simply describe themselves as bilingual or not on the basis of whether they think they can carry on a conversation in French.
(d) Of 60 major post-secondary institutions, only 3 universities (all in B.C.) and three bilingual faculties or affiliated colleges require any second-language knowledge for admission, and only 2 require it for graduation. (p. 189)
Previously, second-language requirements were much more widespead; interestingly, institutions dropped them during the very period when the federal government was instituting its bilingualism policy.
8. In the *Globe*'s translation, "*leur personne*" was rendered "their personal lives" and "*enraciner*" was rendered "establish". The plant metaphor of "*enraciner*" was lost, while "*payer de sa personne*" was rendered via an implicit contrast between personal (private) and public life, and the notion of self-sacrifice was lost. One possible idiomatic translation of the passage would be:

"I would appreciate it if you could transmit this message to the National Council for me: I would like to say thank you from the bottom of my heart. My thanks to you personally and to all those men and women — they know who they are — who have for years been sacrificing their personal energies and their pocketbooks to the task of building and maintaining a healthy, democratic road to the future, a road which together we have laid out for the benefit of the people of Quebec."
The use of "national" here, in "National Council", is of interest in that it remains unidiomatic in an otherwise idiomatic rendering. An idiomatic equivalent (in the sense of what such a party council would be called in English Canada) would be "Provincial Council", but that would be a very odd translation here given that the very *raison d'être* of the Parti Québécois under René Lévesque was to challenge the status of Quebec as merely a province of Canada. Another example of a conventional unidiomatic rendering is "National Assembly" (*Assemblée nationale*) instead of "Quebec Legislature". But where proper names are not involved, English "national" often cannot be used to render French "national" because the French word is often used by Quebeckers (whatever their political views) to refer to Quebec, whereas the English word is used by English Canadians to refer to the whole of Canada. A real problem arises when French "*national*" is used in political texts: using English "national" can cause confusion; not using English "national" may betray the author's meaning.

9. In his introduction, Hermans describes an approach to literary translation which does not seek to "provide guidelines for the next translation to be made" or "pass judgement on any number of existing ones" but "takes the translated text as it is and tries to determine the various factors that may account for its particular nature", looking at the "constraints and assumptions that may have influenced the method of translating". (pp. 12-13)

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