Introduction: On Translation

The term 'translation' has many uses. For example, in geometry, a translation is a transformation that moves every point in a figure the same distance in the same direction so that the shape and size of the figure is not altered. In biology, the term refers to a process that takes place in living cells. In the social sciences, the term 'translation' has been used to refer to the movements of people and peoples, with their identities, to new sociocultural settings, and to the adjustments that this demands. In the philosophy of language, the term has been used to cover all interpretation of the speech of another; and in the performing arts, it may be used to refer to the representation in one medium of a work originally produced in another.

In this book, we are concerned with translation between texts in different languages. This seems to be the most commonly employed usage of the term: among 100 tokens randomly produced by a search of the British National Corpus, only twenty-one terms referred to other senses of translation: six to matters of finance, four to computing, three to the work of lawyers, two each to medical matters, scientific activities and number, and one each to data and technology. But it is difficult to define translation between languages precisely, because definitions so easily run into other terms that are themselves difficult to define precisely

Exercise I.i

A. Write down a definition of translation as you understand it.
B. If you are working in groups, compare your definitions and discuss the differences between them.

The understanding of translation employed in this book is the following:

Translators use a text in one language, following its own rules and spoken and used for writing in certain sociocultural and temporal settings, as the basis for

> making a text that can function in the same or a very similar way to the first text in another language with another rule system, usually in another location and often at a different time.

This understanding of translation reflects or even conceals a dilemma that translators are regularly faced with, which arises from the circumstance that a translation almost always needs to satisfy two common expectations that consumers of translations generally have. These are (1) that there will be strong semantic similarity between a text and its translation (they will mean the same), and (2) that there will be weak physical similarity between a text and its translation (the translation will not look or sound like the text it is a translation of). If we come across a translation that does look or sound like the text it is a translation of, we often accuse the text of displaying 'translationese', that is language use that does not sound quite natural and which may betray the text as a translation.

Exercise I.ii
Consider the following text, which is taken from a tourist brochure:

> [Place Name] offers fantastic nature experiences, where you will get real close. This gives feelings for nature. The feelings should preferably be reflected in our actions in the everyday, so that we will make progress in taking care of the nature. Thus the main efforts of [Place Name] point to the future in order to make everybody take better care of nature.

A. Can you identify instances of translationese in the text above?
B. Suggest how the text might be improved.

Together, expectations (1) and (2) can be challenging for a translator because physical, linguistic details almost always contribute significantly to meaning; therefore, it can be difficult to keep meaning stable when linguistic detail varies, as the two expectations demand. After all, languages differ. No wonder, therefore, that books on translation commonly dwell on the problems translators face and, of course, on providing solutions to these problems. This book takes a more optimistic approach, choosing to see translating as a fascinating task that offers multiple opportunities for creativity on the translator's part, and to encourage translators to adopt an attitude to the texts they are dealing with which is closely related to the attitude to art that Scruton (1974/1988) calls 'aesthetic'. The aesthetic attitude to an object *X* is interest in the object for its own sake, and this amounts to

> a desire to go on hearing, looking at, or in some other way having experience of *X*, where there is no reason for this desire in terms of any other desire or appetite that the experience of *X* may fulfil, and where the desire arises out of, and is accompanied by, the thought of *X*. . . . If I am interested in *X* for its own sake, then I shall respond to the question 'Why are you interested in *X*?' with the expression of the thought that provides the reason for my continued interest – in other words, I shall respond with a description of *X*. (Scruton 1974/1988: 148)

I have argued (Malmkjær 2020) that translation may be considered the kind of description that Scruton proposes – but of course a description of a text. Some such descriptions are very accurate, other descriptions less so. The comparison between the object of Scruton's aesthetic attitude and a text to be translated also suggests that a translator would do well to adopt the aesthetic attitude to that text, that is, to afford it considerable attention. However, the moment the decision is taken to translate, or the thought is even entertained of translating the source text, the aesthetic attitude, which is supposed to be disinterested except in the object of the attitude, is, if not forgone, then at least imbued with functionality, and therefore it is not completely identical to Scruton's disinterested concentration on the object. Nevertheless, I think it is not too far-fetched to suggest that translating requires the translator to attend aesthetically to the source text, as well as to the translation being created; and this translation is, in a certain sense, a description of the source text.

A second effect of a decision to translate a text is that the translator's process of reading the text (even a first read-through) differs from the process of reading for information or for pleasure (Jakobsen and Jensen 2008). This is likely to be at least partly because the translator, who knows they are going to be translating the text, bears in mind both languages involved, that of the source text and that of the translation-to-be, and is already beginning to make reasoned choices from that second language in view of what they are reading. So translating makes considerable cognitive demands on the translator beyond reading and writing, and some of the research that we will consider in Section 1.3 has attempted to investigate and chart these demands. This book, in contrast, is intended to help you respond to them. To this end, the book offers you a number of exercises throughout its chapters.

CHAPTER 1

What We Can Know about Translation and How We Can Come to Know It

Preview

In this chapter, I describe some traditional ways of thinking about translation, before testing them against evidence about how translators translate; this evidence is provided by empirical investigations of the translation process. Questions about the translation process have attracted increasing attention from both scholars and practitioners, because they realize that if translator training and translating automation are to move ahead, it is crucial to understand how translation happens. Martin Kay, a prominent member of the International Committee of Computational Linguistics and a pioneer of machine translation and of systems providing machine-assisted translation, put it like this: 'The trouble with research on machine translation is that we don't know enough about translation' (quoted in Harris 2011: 11). Indeed, it is no longer true that '*how* translation happens is still a somewhat peripheral question', as O'Brien (2011: 1) put it, nor that 'What the translator actually does is an under-analysed concept' (Jones 1989: 184). Rather, the questions of how translation happens and what translators actually do have taken centre stage in research in translation studies since the second decade of the twenty-first century, although it has shared that position with a number of other, related, issues. In fact, as we come to understand more and more aspects of our discipline better and better, talk of centres and peripheries turns out to make less and less sense. In the past, when translation studies was a young subject and a little insecure, there may have appeared to be safety in asserting its independence and ability to compete with other academic subjects. Now that we can feel more secure, cooperation, knowledge sharing and recognition of mutual interests are the order of the day.

1.1 Translation: Beliefs and Attitudes

The term 'translation' is sometimes used about both written and spoken text. In this book, however, 'translation' is only used of written text, whereas spoken translation

is referred to as interpreting. This is in line with the practice of many large organizations' translation departments. For example, the European Commission explains on its Translation web page that it 'deals exclusively with written texts' (European Commission's Directorate-General nd); and the United Nations translation website clearly indicates the same, adding that 'The translation of the spoken word, whether simultaneously or consecutively, is referred to as "interpretation"' (United Nations DGACM nd). Similarly, the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) in the United Kingdom says on its website that 'Translation can be defined as the process of converting written text or words from one language to another, whereas interpreting is the process of orally converting spoken words from one language to another, or between one language and another' (ITI nd). I will not discuss interpreting in any detail in this book, but see Setton and Dawrant (2016) for a course in conference interpreting and Cirillo and Niemants (2017) for information on the teaching of dialogue interpreting.

Steiner (1975/1992: 248–249) divides 'the theory, practice and history of translation' into four periods. The first begins with Cicero (46 BCE) and Horace (c. 19 BCE) and ends with Hölderlin (1804). Robinson (1997) does not mention Hölderlin, perhaps because, as Constantine (2011: 81) has it, 'Hölderlin propounded no theory of translation and had no fixed way of translating either'. According to Constantine, Hölderlin merely produced a 'few explicit remarks', expressing what he refers to as 'the writerly attitude toward translation, which boils down to "What's in it for me?"'. In fact, as Steiner points out (1992: 248–249), in this initial period in his historical divisions, writings on translation theory grew directly out of translators' own experience of translating. These writings include famous examples such as Martin Luther's *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen* (Open letter on translating) (1530) which concerns Luther's translation of the Bible (and biblical translation in general). Clearly, reading records of translators' experiences of translating is one way of coming to know something about translating, and biblical translation continues to provide much food for translation-theoretical thought, as expressed prominently by scholars affiliated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (now SIL International) and the American Bible Society; scholars affiliated with SIL International include, for example, the late Eugene A. Nida (1914–2011) and Ernst-August Gutt (see e.g. Nida 1964; Gutt 1991).

Many consumers and commissioners of translations tend to assume that the main purpose of a translation is to represent all aspects of the source text as closely as possible; that is, they expect a text that is equivalent to the source text. However, translators of texts which are designed to have a global reach may need to adjust the wording to ensure that the text will have appeal and relevance to the various reader groups. This concern is at the basis of one of three prominent understandings of what is commonly termed 'equivalence' in translation studies, namely the conception of equivalence developed by Nida (1964). Nida's distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence will be discussed below, along with the understandings of the equivalence concept developed by John Cunnison Catford (1965), and by Gideon Toury (1978/1980). An alternative approach to engaging the audience for one's translation, not based on equivalence but on the notion of purpose, was developed

by Hans Vermeer (1978), who refers to it using the Greek term, *skopos*. This alternative approach nevertheless shares something with Nida's in its focus on adjusting the text to ensure its appeal to its audience; as Vermeer (1989/2000: 226) points out, in an advertisement, for example, audience appeal and persuasion are more important than close linguistic equivalence between the original text and the translation, which 'may diverge from each other quite considerably, not only in the formulation and distribution of the content but also as regards the goals which are set for each' (1989/2000: 223).

Writings on translation that focus on equivalence between two texts often refer to these as the source text (the original) and the target text (the translation). These terms are used to avoid any suggestion that the pair of terms 'original' and 'translation' might encourage, that one text (the original) is somehow superior to the other (the translation). This view has prevailed from time to time in the not-so-distant past. For example, Richards (1979: 4–6) explains that when the eighteenth-century German author and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe suffered writer's block, he engaged in literary translation because this was after all literary work 'even though of a subordinate kind'. Similarly, jingles like the Italian 'traduttore, traditore' ('translator, traitor'), recorded by Giusti (1873), imply that a translator must inevitably betray the original. Furthermore, if a translation is beautiful, it has been suggested, then it must be unfaithful to its original. This sentiment is encapsulated in the term 'Les Belles Infidèles' which the seventeenth-century French scholar Gilles Ménage applied to the very free translations made of the classics by his near contemporary, the French translator Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt (Giroud 2010: 1216; see Brodie 2022 and Merkle 2022), and which the French linguist, translator and semiotician Georges Mounin uses as the title of his book on translation theory (1955). The expression of course assumes that translations resemble women in being incapable of being both beautiful and faithful, and is therefore at least as insulting to women as it is to translators and translations. For further discussion of equivalence, see Section 5.3.

The terms 'source text' and 'target text' carry their own difficulties with them, though. It has been pointed out that the term 'target' may easily connote the hoped-for destination of a bullet or an arrow and is therefore an unfortunate, bellicose term to use for an item such as a translation, which is most often intended to promote and enhance interpersonal understanding. To avoid this unpleasant connotation, this book will use the pair of terms 'first-written text' and 'translation'. Another reason for selecting these terms is that they reflect the view we adopt here that nothing distinguishes the two texts *qua* texts other than the simple fact that one was typically written before the other – although there are cases of translation, notably in the European Union, for example, where no text involved in a translation situation is officially designated or acknowledged as written before the other and where text drafts flit back and forth between language sections so that it is difficult to distinguish any full text as the 'first' with respect to its associates, and where the term 'language version' is preferred to the term 'translation' (see Koskinen 2008; Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2002: 7–9).

Steiner's second period of translation theory, practice and history begins with the publication of two essays around twenty years apart. The first of these was written by

the Scottish advocate and Edinburgh University Professor of History, and of Greek and Roman antiquity, Alexander Fraser Tytler. It was published in 1792 under the title *Essay on the Principles of Translation*. The second essay was written by the German theologian, philosopher and biblical scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher. It was published in 1813 under the title *Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersetzens* (On the various methods of translating). This is the period during which theorizing about translation began in earnest, in the sense that the theoretical writings published then were no longer tied to the writers' own experiences of translating particular texts. Instead, writers began to probe the phenomenon of translating in general and also its relationship to other disciplines that focus on language and the human mind. The pursuit of this relationship, or these relationships, has by no means ended, as we shall see in Section 1.3, but it began to develop a more scientific edge when the first attempts at machine translation were made at the end of the 1940s, and scholars began to understand the complexity of the translating endeavour. After that, says Steiner (1975/1992: 249), 'we are fully in the modern current', which is the period that this book focuses on. In this modern period, translation studies was named (Holmes 1972/1988) and achieved recognition as a discipline, so that it became possible to specialize in translation in its own right, rather than as an extra asset, relevant or related to certain aspects of a scholar's other, main, pursuit, as the quotation above from Richards (1979) clearly implies that it is.

In the early part of this modern period, it is possible to identify at least two major topics of discussion concerning translation studies. One centred on the place of translation studies within what we might loosely call the academy: was it an art or a science? The second, not wholly separate from the first, concerned the relationship between translation studies and other disciplines; for example, should translation studies consider itself a branch of comparative literature (and thus, arguably, be classed as an 'art') or should it align itself with linguistics (and thus, arguably, be considered a science)? Nida (1964) famously presents the case for the second position. It is his intention to provide 'an essentially descriptive approach to the translation process', and this approach, he believes, commits him to grounding his study in linguistics: 'The fundamental thrust', he writes, 'is, of course, linguistic, as it must be in any descriptive analysis of the relationship between corresponding messages in different languages'. Nevertheless, he adds, the focus 'is by no means narrowly linguistic, for language is here viewed as but one part of total human behavior, which in turn is the object of study of a number of related disciplines' (1964: 8).

The view of translating as an art is encapsulated in the title of Selver's book, *The Art of Translating Poetry* (1966), and eloquently made by Jones (1989), according to whom translating, especially translating poetry, 'could be called the art of compromise' (197). Jones discusses the translation of poetry with particular reference to his own experience as a translator of poetry, but points out that 'discussions with other translators and participation in translation workshops have shown [his experience] to be fairly typical' (1989: 185). Jones refers to translating as 'recreativity', a process of 'creating a new text along the model of an existing one' conceding, nevertheless, that 'all translation is a form of creation' (1989: 184). On the basis of his personal experience, Jones develops a model of poetic translation, which, in common with many

models of translation, has three main phases, which Jones refers to as (i) understanding of the source text, (ii) interpretation, which is 'the search for cross-text equivalences' and (iii) creation, 'the construction of a target text' which comes to stand 'in a relationship of greater or lesser equivalence to the source text' (1989: 187). Bell (1991: 62–75), similarly, suggests three parts to the translation process, basing his model on the translation of a poem. His first phase is Analysis (reading the source-language text), which is followed by a phase called Preparing to Translate, and the final phase is called Synthesis, during which the target text is written. Bell's model depends 'on insights from linguistics and cognitive science', and he comes down on the science side of the debate about where translation belongs, apparently because the vast majority of translating is made of 'technical, medical, legal administrative' texts and 'the vast majority of translators are professionals engaged in making a living rather than whiling away the time in an agreeable manner by translating the odd ode or two on winter evenings' (1991: 5). Amusing though Bell's defence of translating as a scientific endeavour may be, it seems odd to imply that the translation of an ode cannot be approached scientifically, and that the type of the text that is undergoing translation should determine the translator's approach to its treatment; and Bell himself in fact presents his scientific account of the translation process on the basis of the translation of a poem. Be that as it may, accounts of translation as a tripartite process are very common indeed; for example, Nida (1964: 241) proposes that 'Technical [translation] procedures consist essentially of three phases: (1) analysis of the respective languages, source and receptor; (2) careful study of the source-language text; and (3) determination of the appropriate equivalents.'

A so-called integrated approach to translation studies was proposed by Mary Snell-Hornby (1988/1995), whose view is that text type does not determine the severity of what she refers to as 'any translator's dilemma', namely the tension between reproduction and recreation (Snell-Hornby 1988/1995: 1). It is Snell-Hornby's hope that by replacing the traditional dichotomies in translation theory between, for example, word-based and sense-based translation units, proposed by Cicero, and between different types of equivalence, for example dynamic versus formal equivalence, proposed by Nida (1964; see below), with 'a holistic, gestalt-like principle based on prototypes dynamically focused at points on a cline' (Snell-Hornby 1988/1995: 2), 'the multi-dimensional character of language with its dynamic tension of paradoxes and seemingly conflicting forces becomes the basis for translation' (1995: 2). This is a good place to begin to examine this and other theories of translation that have been based, more or less firmly, on a particular linguistic theory. In Catford's case, that of Halliday (1961) and in Nida's case that of Chomsky (1957). Snell-Hornby herself is especially enchanted by Charles Fillmore's scenes-and-frames semantics (1977).

The title and subtitle of Catford's book, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics* (1965) is about as specific as it is possible to be about the nature and purpose of a piece of work. Catford wants to provide 'an account of what translation *is*', as he puts it in his preface (1965: vii), and because he sees translation as 'an operation performed on languages', he believes that the translation theory he has set out to develop 'must draw upon a theory of language' (1965: 1). This is perhaps

slightly odd, given that the object to be investigated is translation, not language; and is translation not rather a process performed *with* language? Arguably, a formulation like Catford's runs the risk of obscuring the nature of the item being investigated (the 'operation') by prioritizing a description of the object that the so-called operation is said to be 'performed' on. Indeed, Catford's first chapter is an account of the general linguistic theory he has chosen to work with, as presented by Halliday (1961) and by Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964). This theory is social in its conception, insofar as it considers language to be 'a type of patterned human behaviour . . . perhaps the most important way in which humans interact in social situations' (Catford 1965: 1). Therefore, the starting point for the Hallidayan grammar that Catford builds his translation theory on is social: 'Our starting point', he begins 'is a consideration of how language is related to the human social situations in which it operates' (1965: 1). Such a situation will include a speaker/writer, whom Catford refers to as a *performer*, as well as at least one other participant, an *addressee* (1965: 1; italics in the original). The medium of communication may be spoken or written and may therefore be realized phonologically or graphologically, and its abstract levels of theorizing are grammar and lexis (vocabulary). The relationship between grammar and lexis on the one hand and the situation on the other is context (Catford 1965: 3). Context is a concept that has occupied the minds of most, possibly all, linguists concerned with language as a social phenomenon, and which in the later decades of the twentieth century also made its way into cognitively oriented theories of language like that of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986) and the account of translation derived from it by Ernst-August Gutt (1991).

Catford (1965: 20; italics in the original) defines translation as '*the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)*', where 'SL' stands for source language and 'TL' for target language. Translation equivalence obtains between linguistic items (of various lengths and ranks) for situational rather than formal reasons, namely when they are '*interchangeable in a given situation*' (Catford 1965: 49; italics in the original). Therefore, the aim in translation is mostly 'to select TL equivalents . . . with the greatest possible overlap of situational range' with the source-language items (49). It happens, of course, that aspects of the situation where the ST operates cannot be matched very closely, or at all, with the situation where the translation is to operate, in which case translators may take various measures like annotation, explanation or simply borrowing; borrowing occurs in situations where the term is not translated at all, as in the case of *pizza*, for example, which has been borrowed from Italian for use in English and numerous other languages.

The units of Hallidayan grammar are (from smallest to largest; smaller units make up units at the level immediately above) morpheme, word, group, clause and sentence. So morphemes make up words, words form groups, groups form clauses, and clauses form sentences. Such a grammar is 'rank based' and its organizing principle is a 'rank scale'. The Hallidayan group corresponds to what most other grammars refer to as a 'phrase'. 'Below' the grammar is phonology and 'above' grammar is text. 'Below' and 'above' here are obviously place indicators metaphorically only; they are used to highlight the borders or limits of grammar. It is true that sounds (phonemes)

make up words, but the ways in which they do so are studied within phonology, not within grammar; similarly, the ways in which sentences compose texts is studied as text analysis, not as grammar (text grammars have been proposed, but will not detain us here; see Van Dijk 1972). The main drawback of a theory of translation that is based on a theory of grammar might be expected to be that the upper limit of grammatical description is the sentence, whereas translation decisions very regularly need to be made on the basis of phenomena that span across sentences in a text. However, the theory that Catford draws on also takes lexical relations seriously, including those generally known as collocation and lexical sets: 'A collocation is the "lexical company" that a particular lexical item keeps' Catford 1965: 10) and 'a *lexical set* is a group of lexical items which have similar collocational ranges' (1965: 11). For example, he points out, 'sheep' collocates frequently with 'field', whereas 'mutton' collocates frequently with terms like 'roast'; so the two terms belong to different lexical sets. In contrast, 'chicken' belongs to the same lexical set as 'mutton' insofar as both collocate strongly with 'roast'. These concepts have proven immensely helpful in translation theory because, among other facets, they pinpoint both that and why it is that several terms with similar senses (e.g. high, tall) are often not interchangeable either within or across languages. For example, a building can be both high and tall in English, but a person can only be tall (if a person is high, they are intoxicated in some way, but may be either tall or short). In Danish, in contrast, 'høj' does duty for tall versions of either phenomenon, buildings and persons (as well as for intoxicated people, although these can also be described using the adjective 'skæv'). 'High' and 'tall' have different collocational ranges in English, and a translator needs to know what these are when translating the Danish term 'høj' into English. In order to come to know this, a translator can explore a corpus of English texts. A corpus, in the relevant sense, is a collection of texts, usually stored and searchable electronically. A search of such a corpus for the terms 'high' and 'tall' will illustrate their most frequent collocates, and it is likely that the collocates for 'tall' will include many more references to human beings than the collocates for 'high' will.

Exercise 1.1 Corpus exploration

In this exercise, you will practise using a corpus of English. You can use the British National Corpus (BNC, www.english-corpora.org/bnc/), or any other corpus of English.

A. Look up the terms 'tall' and 'high' in the corpus to test out the assertion made just above that the collocates for 'tall' include many more references to human beings than the collocates for 'high' do.
B. Think of a term in a language other than English which presents the same need for an informed choice in translation into English as the Danish term 'høj' does. Use a corpus to test your sense of what would be the most appropriate translation into English of the term you have identified. What is it that determines which term is the appropriate translation?