International Journal of Arabic-English Studies
Vol.I. No.1 June 2000

INTRODUCTION TO TRANSLATION THEORY AND CONTRASTIVE TEXTOLOGY IN ARAB UNIVERSITY TRANSLATION CLASSES

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Translation courses are found in most Arab University English programmes but the rationale for their existence is seldom made explicit. In a survey of syllabi of such programmes, Bahumaid (1995:99) found that (with one exception) 'no set of clearly defined objectives of the translation course is provided in the course description/outline'. The most common reasons for teaching translation at university level are a) linguistic and b) vocational/professional, but it seems that both in the West and in the Arab World the latter type of (career-oriented) courses are few and far between. A survey report on Translation in British Universities BA Degree French Language programmes found that 'translation [was] taught as a way of improving students' linguistic proficiency in nineteen of the twenty-one institutibns which answered the survey questionnaire' (Sewell, 1996: 137). It is true that the two aims can coincide. Improved linguistic proficiency would normally lead to a better chance of employment as a translator. But some scholars feel that the university translation class could be more effectively focussed on developing professional translation skills (Critchley et al, 1996) while others consider that the traditional practice of prose/translation exercises are neither realistic nor relevant to the work of the professional translator.

It seems that it will be a long time before English Departments in Arab World Universities get round to designing and offering truly vocational translation courses. However, my purpose in this paper is not to examine this subject but rather to consider. another (although related) point, namely, what should be the theoretical component of such translation courses? Some writers think that theory has no place in a university translation course and should be discarded in favour of more practical

work (Klein-Braley, 1996:26). But on the whole there is a consensus that such courses need a principled theoretical background or as Durieux (in Ballard, 1996) puts it 'un cadre de travail'. Coming nearer home, Bahumaid characterises 'the lack of a theoretical component [as] yet another drawback in most Arab University undergraduate translation programmes' (ibid). If we accept that theory is desirable, two questions inevitably arise i) what theory to teach and ii) how to teach it?

The question of theory is a vexatious one in view of the bewildering array of definitions of translation on offer. These range from semiotic to communicative to textual to interpretative and many are of a high degree of complexity and not easily grasped. One thinks of Neubert's definition of translation as 'text-induced text production' (1992:119) or Wilss' semiotic 'lexical, syntactic and text-pragmatic transfer of SL sign-combinations into functionally corresponding TL sign-combinations' (1982:xi). The 'Paris School' adopt an essentially interpretative and dynamic approach (Seleskovitch, 1984) while in a communicative model the translator is characterised as 'a kind of 'filter' who has a dual role as 'stand-in communicatee/ stand-in communicator' (Uwajeh, 1994).

Pinning down the nature and scope of translation theory is even more daunting. Some writers favour an essentially pragmatic (or non-theoretical) approach eg. Newmark's 'background for problem solvirtg' (1981: 19). Here, one is reminded (perhaps unfairly) of Bahumaid's description of the 'traditional' translation class.' In such classes, the teacher usually hands studehts a 300-400 word passage to translate, followed by a lot of exhortations with plenty of *do* 's and *don'ts.* (ibid : 101). On the other hand, scholars writing in the modern (linguistic) era of translation have failed to come up with a single all-encompassing theory. Indeed, Arrojo (1998) suggests that the quest for such a theory from an essentialist perspective is ultimately doomed to failure. To add to this somewhatgloomy picture, Arab students of translation theory labour undef an additional handicap. Ref g<;e works in the field of translation studies iuevitable tend to be in English, French, German or some other European language and pitched at a high level of theoretical complexity while the illustrative examples (in all but a few cases) are similarly Eurocentric.

In this rather fluid situation, I have found it helpful to focus on two pre-theoretical notions, which are undoubtedly controversial in the literatur"e

but have the virtue of having been at the heart of the translation debate through the ages and (perhaps because of their very indefinability) easily grasped. These are the notions of *meaning* and *equivalence.* Dr. Johnson robustly defined translation as 'to change into another language, retaining the sense' (Haas, 1968:86) and the concept of 'meaning' is still to be found in a semiotic definition of translation such as Lawendowski's (1978:267). Although deconstructive thinking now questions the stability of meaning as well as of texts, the concept of the fixed linguistic sign is still familiar to most although the various aspects or types of meaning may not be. Similarly, Nida's (1966: 19) definition of translation as 'producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent first in meaning and secondly in style' embodies a second comprehensible notion which, despite being superseded by *norms* in the writings of the *empirical* school, refuses to go away. *Meaning* and *equivalence* have been - and continue to be - concepts at the heart of translation and as such are eminently suitable for use as Trojan horses for entry into the walled city of Translation Theory but there is another consideration that commends them in the translation class. Unlike dichotomies such as *formlfimction, literal!ji·ee,* and *communicative/semantic* , they are easily contextualized and readily 'operationalised'. The latter problem was highlighted by Critchley et al (ibid: 103) alluding to students who had apparently picked up theoretical knowledge but were failing to apply it in solving real translation problems. And uncontextualised examples such as how to translate *Ahmed kicked the bucket* .into Arabic from a formal or functional perspective (El-Shiyab, 1996: 170) are not helpful in marrying theory with practice.

The basic premise in the approach to theory in this paper is that language is about meaning and translation is about equivalence of meaning. One recalls Firth's dictum that the task of descriptive linguistics is 'to make statements of meaning' (1957:190). However, meaning is multi-faceted, not simply referential, and this has to be explained and exemplified for/by the students. A further premise in the approach is that transiation students should actively contribute by putting theory into practice utilizing their knowledge of the source and target languages. Meaning can be subdivided into *contextual, pragmatic, cultural, connotative* and *semiotic.* These various kinds of meaning are briefly explained and exemplified and students are encouraged to come up with further exampies of each type. Naturally, exemplification is from the L1 and L2 cultures (Omani/Arab and English) in order to achieve maximum clarity: Take for example:

The different contextual equivalents to جدولin translation(جدول الاعمال: agenda, جدول بياني: chart, جدول الرواتب: payroll etc) , (ii) the functional equivalent of نعيما, (iii) the treatment of cultural-specific items such as Boxing Day and الهبطة; (iv) The connotative value of such pairs as house/home and دار/منزل and; (v) The semiotic resonance of equivalents such as : الاندلس Andalusia and Gibraltar: جبل طارق for their respective speech communities.

Not only is meaning multi-faceted but it is structured differently across languages and distinguishing different levels of equivalence can see this. The *semantic* level of equivalence can be subdivided into *grammatical* and *lexical,* the fanner corresponding to Vinay and Darbelnet' s *tran positions* and the latter their *modulations.* Transpositions involve changes in the ordering of words in phrases/sentences (eg. He slept for a long time: اطال النوم and انتصف الليلIt was midnight) and are generallyconsidered unavoidable although in this connection Al-Safi (1994) distinguishes between a *static* (or literal) and a *dynamic* rendering, the latter aiming to meet the TL collocational, idiomatic and literary requirements while transmitting the meaning faithfully. Modulations involve a change in point of view (e.g. firemen: رجال المطافئ and petrol bomb: زجاجة حارقة) and these can be discussed in connection with differing metaphorical extensions (hand of the clock: عقرب الساعة and foot of the page:ذيل الصفحة) and lexical gaps (e.g. شماتة/مودع and cosy, quaint). *Pragmatic* and *cultural* equivalence, of course, overlap with their counterparts above but equivalence can be further explored at these levels by considering:

a) The role and functional value of greetings and politeness forms in the two cultures (e.g. الحمدلله على السلامة and Welcome back!) and
b) The degree of *adaptation* required for such culture-specific items as Baccalaureate and الشهادة الثانوية العامة After this theoretical exposition and discussion, a text can be analyzed in order to operationalize theconcepts introduced.

This can be done as a co-operative (group) activity in order to encourage students' 'active interaction, with instructors as well as peers, in the common search tor the best possible solution to the translation problems at hand' (Bahumaid, ibid). Students are urged to look for examples of semantic, pragmatic and cultural differences between the Stand a putative TT. A typical Joha short story turned up the following instances of equivalence: (i) *grammatical* اخذ يحمل : He began carrying away,

عند خروجه: as he was leaving, لم يكن منه الا ان جمع He simply collected.. (ii) *lexical-* ما يقع تحت يده: whatever he could lay his hands on, فاحس بحركة السارق: He heard the thief's movements, (iii) *cultural* مافي غرفة نومه من الأثاث:bedding, bedclothes rather than 'furniture' (culturally inappropriate), (iv) *pragmatic-* اولم تنتقل الى هذه الدار؟:I thought we were moving to this house (statement rather than question to express the irony in English).

Fallowing work on these three levels, two more levels of equivalence can be introduced, namely *textual* and *stylistic.* As before, theoretical exposition is closely intertwined with practical application of concepts but at this point some contrastive generalisations about the source and target languages may be included. These may be drawn from the literature and filtered to the students rather than given as direct reading. The concepts of *text, texture* and *cohesion* are discussed and various kinds of sentence-linking words exemplified. Generalisations on contrastive textuality may also be mentioned: e.g. Arabic uses 'a relatively small number of conjunctions. Each of them has a wide range of meanings' (Baker, 1992: 193). Additionally, there is 'The predilection of English journalistic style for a series of short sentences with logical links between them left implicit is not shared by Arabic, in which longer sentences tend to be formed with links made explicit (Emery, 1987: 64). A second text is now distributed and students are asked to:

a) mar with a slash where sentence breaks would be in the English TT
b) list all the Arabic conjunctions/linking words (noting that these can be inside as well as outside sentences).
c) write the likely equivalent of each Arabic conjunction in the English translation (if any)
d) identify problems of pragmatic equivalence (e.g. in the Arabic expressions رحمه الله and العوض بسلامتكم. Again this exercise can be done as a group activity and, having been prepared; the first and second texts can be assigned for individual iranslation practice.

In a subsequent class the concept of formal/ informal *styles* can be exemplified from English and this sensitive question can then be broached with regard to Arabic. A brief introduction to *diglossia* with its concomitant *high* (H) and *low* (L) varieties is necessary here in view of the controversial status of colloquial Arabic dialects as written varieties. Once again the most effective way of appreciating the significance of this

dichotomy is by applying the notions to actual texts. In a short story by Nagib Mahfouz from حكايات حارتنا the dialog is written in H. A useful exercise is to have students render this into informal spoken English.. For instance the narrator's mother informs him that their nice neighbours are going back to Syria: جيراننا الطيبون راحلون الى بر الشام, to which he asks and his mother answers ابعد مما نستطيع ان نبلغه اهو بعيد which could be rendered informally as 'It's too far away for us' or 'We haven't a hope of ever going there'. Another Arabic text in which the dialogue is written in colloquial (L) such as al-Tayeb Saleh's عرس الزين when compared to its English translation by Denys Johnson-Davies *(The Wedding of Zein,* 1971) and the previous text, serves to emphasize the contrast between H and L styles of Arabic. A greater problem, however, is in translation from. English into Arabic H where informal English may lose something of its vitality or – in the case of a Pinter play – of its menace. The following is an excerpt from *The Homecoming* in which Lenny and his father Max are having an altercation:

(يقبض ماكس على عصاه)
ليني: اوه يا ابي بالطبع لن تستعمل عصاك في ضربي اليس كذلك؟ هيه؟ اياك ان تستعمل عصاك معي يا ابي. كلا من فضلك لم تكن غلطتي بل غلطة واحد من الاخرين. لم اقترف اي خطأ يا ابي شرفا لا تضربني بهذه العصا يا أبي.

To have students translate such dialogue into colloquial English and then back into their colloquial Arabic dialect brings home the difference between H and L varieties of Arabic in a more forceful and dramatic way than any amount of theoretical explanation.

.Jt will have been noticed in the approach outlined above that mention was made of notions first put forward during the 'contrastive-linguistics stage' of translation· theory - such as *transposition, modulation,* and *adaptation.* In addition, generalizations from contrastive studies in the field of Arabic-English translation were mentioned and students invited to speculate on the differing *stylistiques* of the two languages at various levels of equivalence. Regarding the first point, it is worth mentioning that some insights from such writers as Vinay and Darbelnet (1977) in the field of *stylistique comparee* have stood the test of time and provide a ready entry into theoretical aspects of translation. The contrastive-linguistics approach was criticised on the grounds of its (supposed) preoccupation with word/phrase and sentence level rather than the text. But although this approach pre-dated subsequent advances in pragmatics and discourse analysis, it is unfair to accuse the descriptive linguistics of the time of

wholly disregarding the textual and situational dimensions of language. To complete Firth's statement above, linguistic analysis should proceed in a holistic, top-down fashion - 'we may accept the language event as a whole and then deal with it at various levels' (ibid). In similar fashion, Vinay and Darbelnet' s concept of adaptation centres on the notion of situational equivalence. A further criticism of the contrastive-linguistics approach was that it was . necessarily restricted to *langue* rather than *parole.* Although it is true that James (1980:66) advances the premise that Contrastive Analysis compares ' abstract elements rather than their concrete realisations', the data of Contrastive Linguistics (CL) need not be restricted to *langue.* Hartmann's concept of *contrastive textology* in particular shows how the data of CL can just as well be drawn from translation praxis. Hartmann states, for example, that the notion of 'parallel texts' which was first developed in translator and interpreter training programmes is not only an important teaching device, but also the obvious empirical foundation for the typological or stylistic comparison of any pair or multiple of languages (1981: 202). In practice, even those who express reservations about the theoretical basis of CL recognize its value in underpinning translation principles (e.g. El-Shiyab op cit. 168). For others, a contrastive approach gives the student a greater awareness of language in general and the nature of source and target languages in particular. Harvey (1996: 60) considers that such an approach ' can help learners acquire a basic model for analysing language, which gives them a greater . awareness and understanding of Ll (a pre-requisite when translating) and can subsequently be applied to L2.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined an approach to introducing students of translation in Arab University English programmes to understanding and applying certain concepts in translation theory and contrastive textology. Clearly, the greater the students proficiency in the source and target language, the more they will benefit **this discipline. (For British students of** French, Hervey and Higgins (1992: 1) assume' that students already have the considerable linguistic resources in French that they need to benefit from a course in [translation methodology]). For this reason it would seem valid to introduce such a course relatively late in the BA English program - certainly no earlier than the third year - in Arab Universities. The approach described in this paper is based on the analysis and 'operationalization' of two pre-theoretical and accessible notions that are

at the heart of translation theory: *meaning* and *equivalence.* The procedure is governed by the following principles:

- learning by doing and the symbiotic relation between theory and practice
- learning as a co-operative active process (rather than an individual passive one)
- a heuristic approach to analysis and comparison of texts (contrastive textology)
- utilizing students' knowledge of SL/TL culture to illustrate concepts and problems in translation theory.

In this way translation theory need not be 'abstract, boring and remote from reality' (Newmark, 1993:170) but applied, absorbing and solidly grounded in the analysis and interpretation of actual SL/TL texts and their translations.

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