

## TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE GAMES

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### *Preliminary Move*

If we are willing to extend our temporal boundaries, probably every modern discipline could be made to look like a language game with rather predictable *régimes*. However, with a discipline as newly cohesive as Translation Studies, we need not have recourse to *longue durée*. The first move (*coup*) was undoubtedly Eugene Nida's *An Analysis of Principles and Procedures with Special Reference to Aboriginal Languages* (1947). This documented exposition of the translation process was an ostensibly neutral communications-oriented description of what occurs in translation. Implicit is an assumption that concepts and experiences, i.e., meanings, codified by users of language A, can be transferred intelligibly for the users of language B. We have subsequently had refereed many countermoves. Walter Benjamin's "Die Aufgabe des Uebersetzers" (1923) was recovered by Harry Zohn's masterly, readable translation in 1955, to give an aphoristic collage of translation in a cosmos controlled by speech/language (*die Sprache*). The most available articulation of this approach is Derrida's "Des tours de Babel" (1980). This asystematic hermeneutic focus on the origin of expression was opposed -- usually scathingly -- by the polysystem proponents who wanted to bring translation scholarship conceptually and methodologically, and hence theoretically, back to the text itself and describe it in terms of its adjustments to the patronage system for which it was designed. The most available articulation of this approach is Gideon Toury's *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (also 1980). *There were two dissenting perspectives on translation theory which were actually much more widely read. One was George Steiner's After Babel* (1975) which divided the field between Chomsky and Sapir/Whorf and proposed his own hermeneutic motion to describe the

translation process. The other was the Guenthnerners' *Meaning and Translation* (1978) which sent readers unfamiliar with formal logic to Quine, especially *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (1969). In terms of the schema of my preliminary remarks I would call Steiner's treatise and the Guenthnerners' anthology two more moves, moves which opened up the game to players of many a discipline. When asked by the American Translators Association to bring all of the foregoing together, a game program, as it were, in 1986, my response was to close with a semi-synthesis, inspired by Juergen Habermas, especially *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (1969) which I could not have appreciated without Jeremy Shapiro's translation of 1978. What I proposed and still stand by is a translation theory checklist, a kind of metatheory. A translation metatheory must have categories for speculation and methodology, with the latter requiring description, evaluation, verification for equivalence and bias accommodation. (It is the category of "bias accommodation" for which I enlisted the authority of Habermas.) Further, if a theory will not help with our understanding of process, practice, and product as seen in concrete texts, it is not likely to be very useful to us -- albeit productive to ponder. I think these conditions are necessary wherever the theory originates, e.g., in Cultural Anthropology, Comparative Literature, Information Systems, Linguistics, or Philosophy. Yet during this period of consolidation in Translation Studies, as the players discover they have been using the same rules, if not the same scoring systems, it may be instructive to look for an inclusive paradigm that would contain the current consensus in Translation Studies. Jean-François Lyotard's reading of language games makes them actual encapsulations of sophisticated interchange. Would certain aspects in Lyotard's view of Postmodernism, specifically language games, provide an epistemic blazon of the state of the discipline? Would this attitude that is Postmodernism, so opposed to theorizing, if not to conceptualizing, actually furnish a summation of current translation theory? A tentative answer. A promising move<sup>1</sup>.

### *Translation and Language Games*

Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté* (1834), my current longterm project, is a complex network of language games. Further, since I am translating it, I am engaged in another language game. My translation, unless another comes out in the interim, will be the first ever in English, and hence in baldest terms an original translation. What the originary text, the pre-text, of *Volupté* was is now the best known thing about it: a *roman à clef* about

his affair with Adèle Hugo. A *roman à clef*, after all, is one of the most exclusive literary language games. I am confronting the issue of origin, for I would say that now, over 150 years later, the *roman à clef* is the least interesting aspect of the *Volupté* and in itself would never have moved me to translate the novel. *Volupté*, which I have tentatively subtitled "the Sensual Man", intrigues me because it is an inside view of an introspective, sensitive, intellectual who is trying simultaneously to castigate and rationalize his abuse of women. As for the ordinary pretext, there is no evidence that he abused Adèle Hugo.

Further -- but beyond the scope of this discussion, although by no means beyond the compass of either translating *Volupté* or situating it in a period-norm *régime* (i.e., Romanticism) -- is its self-reflective style which expands Romantic rhetoric to the brink of disruption.

For the discussion here I want to limit my use of *Volupté* to the courtship games which comprise its chief web of plots. These games will let us explore that form of Postmodern translation theory postulated by Lyotard, and suggest that language games epitomize translation. Lyotard does not mystify translation: "Or les langues sont traduisibles, faute de quoi ce ne sont pas des langues..." (It so happens that languages are translatable, otherwise they are not languages). Yet curiously in my opinion, he claims untranslatability for language games: "... mais les jeux de langage ne sont pas traduisibles, parce que s'ils l'étaient ils ne seraient pas des *jeux* de langage" (... because, if they were, they would not be language games). I shall simply brush this proviso aside. If language games are comprised by language -- otherwise they would be some other kind of game -- they can only embody translatability or its possibility.

Since *Volupté* is not much read any more, let me state that it is a historical novel about the consular period of Napoleon. Sainte-Beuve's fantasized projection Amaury, the first-person narrator, is an intimate of a highly suspect counter-revolutionary the Marquis de Couaën. However, very early in the narrative the marquis is put into protective custody, and Amaury, devoted to the marquis and bewitched by the obliviously exploitative marquise, follows them to sites which make prisoner visitation convenient. Thus, a narrative that might have initially seemed to promise action and suspense becomes a tale told from the sidelines and a rhetorical ploy. In the 1820s, Amaury, now an ecclesiastical administrator in his early sixties, returning to his post in New York, transcribes a record of his misused sensuality for a younger friend whom he sees making the same kind of mistakes. This is certainly the first language game: the rules and hence rhetoric require repentance, but writing this confession allows

Amaury to flagellate and delectate his senses simultaneously. Every relationship within the novel rests on a language game also. Amaury the sensualist is besotted over prostitutes, but that part of his life is off-stage; we do not know what idiom he uses in those circumstances. With Mlle Amélie de Liniers, a charming young neighbor who would have made a loyal wife in the cordial arrangements of his social milieu, he prescribes the affective level of interchange, and she, a perceptive, open young woman, cannot transgress the rules of this regime, which I would characterize as guarded camaraderie. He, in turn, acquiesces to the regime prescribed by the Marquise de Couaën who maintains their relationship at a level of verbally unacknowledged intimacy but tremulous and quivering restraint. But the cynosure of gamesmanship in *Volupté* in Amaury's relationship with Madame de R..., whose spouse for reasons never divulged is not living with her. Amaury and Madame de R... keep each other playing out this "predilection" by "a thousand tricks and ruses which cut, badgered, and harassed." Although he is this sympathetic socialite's standard escort and rarely leaves her current domicile before eleven, the regime requires that he keep watch beneath her bedroom balcony at midnight. The regime is quite regimented: he watches the movement of lights from room to room as they come to consolidate in her apartment, she pulls up a corner of the curtain to make sure he is really there, she practices on the harp "as a prelude to the rising of the rising of the Evening Star." Then there is a pause while he visualizes her hair being let down by the chambermaid. And "then", he reports, "she would lean over her little balcony a moment to throw me some sign of adieu -- a wave of the hand, a scribbled note, the corsage at her bosom." Now at the telling at least, he sees the game as romantic juvenilia: "I never missed that rendezvous and watched beneath that casement like a stubborn sentinel, rain, snow, every phase of the moon, stock-still or prowling, a suspect creature for the rare passers-by who prudently moved away from my shadow." If Madame de R... takes liberties with the rules, practices on the harp too long, for example, Amaury is moved to outrage and the game of rape fantasy: scaling the wall and perpetrating acts of irreversible violence (pp. 237-38).

They stay in the relationship because they have developed both the rules of their game and the pragmatically proven ways of breaking the rules which, not especially paradoxically, are the only ways of ensuring the continuance of the game. Mentally they make themselves delay in the anxiety-producing space of the *différend*. Loytard in proposition 22 calls this "the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put in phrases<sup>2</sup> cannot yet be



... A lot of searching must be done to find new rules for forming and linking phrases that are able to express the *différend* disclosed by the feeling." Then since the two of them do not, really could not, love each other, they must draw back from the new rules their courtship games are always almost automatically triggering. I.e., they find the new rules, but they do not have the new feelings. They pay the penalty of frustrated expression. To return to proposition 22, one must find new rules to express the *différend* disclosed by the feeling "unless one wants this *différend* to be smothered right away in a litigation and the alarm sounded by the feeling to have been useless" (p. 29).

Does not this definition of the *différend* sound like a description of the act of translating? Or, more exactly, do we not inhabit the *différend* when we translate? The experience of the *différend*, no more than that of translating, need not be negative. Proposition 23 assures us that symmetry can occur; i.e., besides the pain of not being able to use language as we expect to is the pleasure of being able to invent a new idiom. Haven't translators always recognized that "what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist"?

To move from the specifics of translating *Volupté*, a complex of language games within the language game of fictional narrative, to translating literature generally, we have always known, to extrapolate from *La Condition postmoderne* (p.23), that as translators we make moves in and between language games. When we say that translators must be in control of the target language, comfortable in the source language, sensitive to norms and traditions of both literatures, aware of the conventions of transfer, we are establishing the rules for entering and/or leaving the game. We are also recognizing that the rules must be observed -- or broken -- with care because of the desired end result to the match. In translation the game is not won, although it can be lost. What is important is to play. Put another way, the important thing is to establish and/or maintain the social bond (*lien social*). We could say that as language games go, translation might be a kind of relay, the text is the *baton* fabricated from the language by the source-language author and taken from him or her by the translator who may handle it differently, even reshape, reconstitute, or reverse it, before handing it on to the readers some of whom may form or formulate slightly different *batons* which will be taken by more translators and passed on to more readers. Whatever the first *baton's* relationship to the mental image or affective experience about a hypothetical platonic stick of wood, there needs to be a basic, valid trust in the mutual resemblance of the *batons* being taken from the author and

handed to the reader by the translator.

In *Le Différend* Propositions 76-80 (pp.78-81) deal specifically with translation. These are followed by Lyotard's readings of Kant's *Esthétique transcendentale* and Gertrude Stein's *Comment Ecrire*, both, obviously discussed in their French translations with Lyotard conscientiously inserting the original German or English in parentheses. (George Van Den Abeele's translated excerpts in the fall 1984 *Diacritics* omitted these propositions as well as the readings.) We can only observe that whatever Lyotard has said about the untranslatability of language games, 9 of the 12 texts he glosses in *Le Différend* are themselves translations. His praxis would be helpless without the practice of translation. In fairness we must observe also that in classroom and lecture hall he repeatedly demystifies translating, as in *Au juste*: translation is what occurs when a text goes from one language to another. It is as if "translatability" and "untranslatability" belonged almost solely to reference, including contextual reference and not to the languages *per se*. Let me review the subpropositions in Propositions 78 and 79, translating -- and inevitably interpreting -- as I go. I believe we will see how closely his remarks apply to transfer between languages.

1. Phrases governed by different rule systems (*régimes*) are untranslatable. Lyotard's translator, of course, uses "phrase" for "*phrase*" throughout. "*Phrase*," of course, is usually translated "sentence." The intent in French is to maintain a spectrum of semantic-syntactic unit. The effect in English necessarily restricts "phrase" to semantic or information unit.

2. We cannot arbitrarily select out the sense effected by syntax from that effected by lexicon.

3. Translation presupposes that the sense of the phrase in the source language can be reconstituted in a phrase of the target language. (Lyotard uses "langue de départ" and "langue d'arrivée.")

4. Sense determined by syntactic form depends both on the regime of phrases governing the phrase in question and the type of discourse in which it is found.

5. This regime and this genre (i.e., of the discourse) determine the governing ensemble of rules of phrase formation, linking, and validation.

6. Thus a translation presupposes that a regime and genre in one language will have their analogue in another or at least that the difference between the two regimes and/or genres in one language has its analogue in another. Difference here means intralanguage relationships

and adjustments and accommodations. Lyotard's example, you will recall, is putting French narrative present and past into Chinese

7. The translator may have to have recourse to the "transversal" appurtenances and logical pertinencies between languages. (*Pertinences* will cover both ideas in French.)

Yet there are provisos.

8. In terms of sense alone, it may be possible to transcribe. "You must leave" (*Vous devez sortir*) may transcribe the sense of "Leave" (*Sortez*), but that is not translating. Indeed it is not! If asked to translate "Vous devez sortir" into English, I would probably say "Please leave", implying a firm tone of voice. For "Sortez," my first response would be "Get out" or "You can't stay here." When Lyotard states that "Vous devez sortir" and "Sortir" are not even intralingual translations, we infer in our own *différend* of text engagement that Lyotard wrestles with the interpretive side of translation and thus can give us moral support for the anxieties and gratifications implicit in our task. (In classroom interchange he is in fact extremely supportive and would have translators accept discrepancies as inevitable givens.)

9. Translation is not a body of abstract concepts; it is a reconstruction of analogous worlds: "Ces univers sont constitués par les situations des instances (non seulement le sens, mais le référent, le destinataire, le destinataire) et par leurs relations" (pp. 80-81). I believe Lyotard's proposition both contains translation and allows for expansion. This proposition, I suggest, is fully amplified in Jan de Waard and Eugene Nida's introduction to *From One Language to Another* (1986): "For any communication there are eight principal elements: source, message, receptor, setting, code, sense channel, instrument channel, and noise" (p.11).

Let me now, circular as the process may be, apply these nine subpropositions to my own project. I think I find as a result that my own task, my own dithering in the *différend*, i.e., translating *Volupté*, is made more orderly. Let me pass *Volupté* in review. The etymological lexicon and syntax which make it quite distinctive, even for Romantic writing, should make it a very clear example.

1. The regimes of literary fiction of French and English are similar. The passage of over 150 years means that fictional rhetorics have changed somewhat. Bulwer-Lytton might have been the most appropriate contemporary translator, so Sainte-Beuve may have to be toned down somewhat to preserve the social bond.

2. Yet, when we interact with the sentences of this novel with its intricate Latinate syntax and pre-Freudian lexicon, we are confronted with difficult choices of mood and manner at all times. We do not want to overly simplify the sentence structure or insert lexical anachronisms.

3, 4, 5, 6. Felicitously, French and English have had continuously close literary relations. It is my impression that first-person narratives have been more continuously in favor in French literature than in English-language literatures. Still, it is an extremely common form for English readers who bring to such a novel a set of accommodations. Further, a literary translation is overt, in the sense used by Juliane House. We may agree in some way that the translation reads as if the author wrote in the translator's language, but we bring a set of accommodations to reading a translation. It would be a mistake, however, to overly modernize the style of this novel, widely read in its own times, largely unread after Saint-Beuve's death in 1869, for it is uncannily Postmodernist in its neo-baroque reflexiveness. The style is integral to its conflicted, complacent self-condemnation.

7. With *Volupté* I would be surprised if I need to have recourse to "transversal pertinencies." I will be obliged, however, to add pertinencies, i.e., use footnotes for the historical references which present-day readers need even in French.

8. & 9. With a novel so very dependent upon language games for first of all, its existence as a *roman à clef* and second for its fable, characterization, and disruptive texture, transcription of mere sense would betray it. Transcription is unthinkable. What is needed is a reconstitution of an analogous world so that readers of *Volupté* in 1990 can see in Amaury a not unlikable victimizer and victim, so that readers will recognize the persistence of verbal sexual power plays and psychological abuse. These "moves" of language games between the sexes have moved into our own presumably much more enlightened era probably without a break even though legal conditions and customs have improved women's lot. His confession should sound neither vaguely archaic, as would happen if I tried to make English words follow a French regime, or disturbingly anachronistic if I moved too close to contemporary idiom. Saint-Beuve's pre-text, the ordinary text, soon ceased to be his pretext and he became perhaps sincere in spite of himself when he lost himself in Amaury's ambivalent self-castigation.

If, as I maintain, translation metatheory must have categories for speculation and methodology, with the latter requiring description, evaluation, verification for equivalence and, bias accommodation for the purpose of illuminating process and practice, Lyotard's Postmodernist



remarks would seem promising. What, by my own checklist, his propositions cover only implicitly is bias accommodation. Such bias is the translator's own; mine in this case. Accommodation is one of the moves I must make in the *différend* of my translating. I.e., even though I cannot keep from empathizing with Amaury's game opponents, his female victims, I must keep my antipathy towards him in check.

To test out my tentative conclusion about translation and language games, we would need, of course, more testing, at least more juxtaposing with a variety of texts. What we need with any translation theory are actual texts, not manufactured examples. The *différend* is a space, a mid-region, a between -- or a quality of betweenness -- and would appear to emphasize the translator and the translation process in the speculation category. When the differences between the source and target expectations are slight or when the conventions are well-established and adequate, translation is relatively easy and our passage through the *différend* is brief. When the differences are considerable, when we must construct the expediences (or "pertinences") ourselves, then we may remain in the space of the *différend* a long time -- or bail out in panic, pitching the *baton*. The resulting methodology in a translation theory derived from Postmodernism which doctrinally eschews theory and would appear to emphasize sensitivity to cultural setting and rhetorical norms. The relativism in Postmodernism would certainly keep the translation theory researcher on the alert for personal bias and ideological pressures. Familiarity with Postmodernist attitudes would surely encourage an energetic response to a total text, both expressed and unexpressed. Such text engagement might even let us speculate why we find some translations are good, some bad; some ageless, some dated. It is too early to say that Postmodernism will generate the next set of rules, a regime, as we have used the term, in translation theory. Further, most translators I know find post-structuralism or deconstructionism too peripheral, hermeneutics too restrictive, formal logic too reductive. Translator look askance at Postmodernism as a kind of play occupying a hitherto unoccupied archeological space. We really want a theory that gives us a positive return on our task. What I can report now is that when I put Lyotard's modest propositions to the test, I was impressed. Like Amaury, "my head was full of enterprising projects."

## NOTES

1. Although this essay was written prior both to Lyotard's seminar at SUNY-Binghamton, April 3-27, 1989, and to a "readiness" reading group in January, February, and March, it was gratifying to find how little modification was needed. It was the consensus of the students in Translation Theory that Lyotard, while exquisitely sensitive to the difficulties of genuine communication, did not share translators' qualms about furthering or hindering communication. He is not being cryptic when he says translation proves the existence of languages.
2. While I can understand why George Van den Abbeele always translated *phrase* as "phrase," I think we should also recognize that sometimes "sentence" (the standard translation, after all) may be intended. But overall I must give Van Den Abbeele's the highest praise. The voice he gives Lyotard in *The Differend* is the voice Lyotard has when he uses English. This is proved conclusively to my satisfaction in *Peregrinations* (1988) which he wrote with David Carroll.

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