On the Applicability of Certain Aspects of Contemporary Translation Theory to two Early Modern French Translations.

1.Introduction

In this essay I will argue that certain common tenets of contemporary translation theory are conditioned by the culture and the age in which they were formulated. An analysis of two Early Modern French translations will demonstrate that these tenets are not applicable to translation practice at this time, primarily due to substantial differences concerning the status of translation. This essay constitutes a further step in work begun by the Tel Aviv theorists¹ who developed the Polysystem theory, according to which translation practice is determined by the status of translation within the cultural/literary system of the target culture (Toury 1995:13). Their work is a response to the homogeneity of the academic community working on translation theory since its first conception as a sub-discipline of linguistics in the second half of the twentieth century (Gentzler 1993:2). Toury (1995) considers norms that vary according to social and cultural differences, contrasting the situation in countries such as Britain, North America and France with that in Israel, a land much more dependent on translated texts. While this work remains broadly synchronic, I will adopt an historical approach that will test further certain common assumptions found in contemporary translation theory.

The choice of aspects of contemporary translation theory to be included in this study was guided by the frequency of the assumptions in the work of different theorists and at different times. Due to limitations on time and space, only those

¹ Including scholars such as Even-Zohar and Toury.

aspects that cannot easily be applied to Early Modern French translations are discussed here. Assumptions examined concern both the general context of translation and text-specific features.

I have selected for consideration the following three assumptions regarding general context: translation loss, dynamic equivalence and identity of aim. Translation loss is assumed by many pedagogical texts to be a necessary consequence of translation² so that the aim of the translator is therefore "to minimize difference rather than to maximise sameness" (Hervey and Higgins 1992:25). Reasons evoked for the inevitablitily of loss in the translation process include the lack of exact synonymy and differences in grammatical structures that lead to circumlocution (ibid:24-25).

In stark contrast to this negative position, Nida's term 'Dynamic Equivalence' allows "the fundamental fact that languages differ radically one from the other" (1964:2) to be compensated for by the very alterations that are viewed by others as instances of loss. A change in word order or of grammatical class thereby becomes the way in which dynamic equivalence is maintained.

While dynamic equivalence assumes that the translator will want to replicate the original effect of the text (Nida 1964:7), the notion of identity of aim goes one step further in assuming that the translator's very motivation is identical to the reasons governing the original writing of the text. This can be seen in Duff who states that: "The writer and the translator share the same thoughts, although they express them in different languages" (1981:xi) and in Eco's notions of 'deep story' and 'micro-/macro-propositions' to be captured by the translator (2001:38-39).

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² E.g. the *Thinking Translation* series: language-specific volumes cited in the bibliography.

The assumptions for consideration regarding text-specific features are: generalisation, intellectualisation and normalisation. Based on tendencies observed in lexical choice, Levý (1963)³ argues that translation inevitably results in generalisation through "einer stilistischen Abschwächung der Lexik" (1969:111). While such an impoverishment is inevitable under the assumption that all translation involves loss, Levý sees it as an avoidable tendency realised by the use of more general terms, of terms that are stylistically neutral and by the lack of exploitation of near synonymous variants.

Levý also highlights the intellectualisation involved in translation: "Der Übersetzer hat zum Text das Verhältnis eines Interpreten, deshalb übersetzt er den Text nicht nur, er >legt ihn aus<, d.h. er logisiert ihn, malt ihn aus und intellektualisiert ihn." (1969:117). Interpretation and explanatory elaboration are also considered features of translation by Øveras (1998:4-5).

The final text-specific assumption to be considered is normalisation; a process represented by a higher frequency of more common words in translation, as demonstrated by Baker (1998), which leads to unnatural language use. This notion is also found in Duff (1981) who instructs translators on the avoidance of the 'third language' which he considers to be the product of inappropriate usages and clashes in the stylistic or semantico-pragmatic makeup of the text.

In order to test the applicability of these assumptions, I analysed a section of two Early Modern French translations of Virgil's Aeneid. The choice of work reflects the interest of the age, as witnessed by the proliferation of translations and imitations

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³ Ironically now only available in a German translation.

⁴ Identified by the common assertion that a translation "sounds wrong" (1981:xi).

of this work throughout the Early Modern period in France.⁵ The respect for Virgil appears to have surpassed that for most other authors of antiquity, resulting in his prophetic status (Thomas 1972:xiii) and authority on questions of morals and literary excellence, in the words of Hulubei: "Virgile éduque, catéchise, instruit; c'est le meilleur pédagogue de l'époque." (1931:6). Above and beyond such literary and social functions, translations of texts of classical authority augmented the prestige of the French vernacular in a period of elaboration of function⁶, paralleled in many vernaculars "non reduictes encores en art certain" (Dolet:1540 Rule IV).⁷ Specific interest was shown for Book VI,⁸ so I have chosen to analyse lines 384 to 476⁹ from this book; a passage involving several different styles (description/dialogue) and several changes in the pace of narrative (e.g. when Aeneas meet Dido) in order to provide data as varied as possible.

The translations to be considered are by Louis Des Masures (1560) and Pierre Perrin (1658), chosen because by falling in the middle of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they reflect well different tendencies of the period, both appearing after significant works such as Dolet (1540) and Vaugelas (1647). The gap of almost one hundred years makes for appropriately contrastive methods of translation, which, interestingly, Perrin points to through criticism of Des Masures in his preface "pour s'estre attachez indiscrettement à la traduction des mots & des phrases latines."

⁵ For a survey of the sixteenth century see Hulubei (1931).

⁶ According to Haugen's (1966) model reproduced in Hudson (1980:33).

⁷ Following convention, s is represented in the normal form, i and j and u and v are distinguished in these transcriptions while all other typographical features are maintained.

⁸ E.g. Du Bellay (1541) translates only books IV and VI.

⁹ Line numbers are taken from Fletcher (1972).

The Early Modern period in France is of particular interest in this study, for it represents an age when the status of translation differed greatly from its status in the Anglo-American world today. We are at once struck by the fact that one of the very first meetings of the *Académie Française* saw the delivery of De Méziriac's (1635) treatise on translation. In fact, the prestige of translation was so elevated that it was even considered by some to be the highest art form¹⁰ and others thought it to be the method through which the French language could be enriched.¹¹ This attitude is quite clearly far removed from some general assumptions regarding translation in Western Europe in the past half century; a distance that will permit a challenging analysis of the potential scope of contemporary translation theory. By considering the particular status and practice of translation, firstly in the sixteenth century and then in the seventeenth century, I will highlight those aspects that evade analysis according to the tenets of contemporary translation theory outlined above, thereby casting doubt over the very assumptions that underpin much contemporary translation theory.

2. Sixteenth-Century Translation Practice

Beginning with the general context for translation, it is clear that the motivation for translation can differ from that expected today. Although Des Masures does not mention this as a motivation for his tackling of the Aeneid, it was a common belief "qu'un des meilleurs moyens d'enrichir notre langue, est de la faire parler aux plus doctes, & plus fameux Auteurs de l'antiquité..." (De Méziriac 1635/1998:3). Perrin was correct to indicate the high level of imitation of the Latin text in Des

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¹⁰ E.g. Sorel quoted in Béarez Caravaggi saying that Malherbe's translations are a "parfait modèle de la narration" (1983:194).

¹¹ E.g. Bachet de Méziriac (1635/1998:3).

Masures' translation¹², but rather than a weakness, this may paradoxically have been intended to demonstrate the capabilities of the vernacular that, far from being a neglected flower,¹³ could actually stand as an equal to the Latin, performing the same twists and turns in an observably similar way. Coupled with previous statements regarding the choice of work (p.4), it is evident that the motivation for translation is far from a desire to produce "...in his audience something of the same effect which is understood to have existed in the response of the original hearers" (Nida 1964:7).

Not only is the notion of dynamic equivalence seen to be inapplicable to the context surrounding the translation process and its textual realisation, it is also questionable whether there is real identity of aim shared by author and translator. This piece is dedicated to a highly influential patron figure, the Duke of Lorraine (1560:5) and following an embarrassing exile in 1547, Des Masures wanted to become favoured again in court circles. The translation of one of the greatest masterpieces of antiquity was doubly rewarding for our translator: he simultaneously performed a patriotic act as service to the French tongue and publicly flattered his patron. The reputed link between the duke's lineage and the Caesars, and hence Aeneas, is significantly mentioned on the second page of his preface (1560:6). His translation is in many ways transposed from the original, in the spirit of the humanist desire to initiate dialogue with the ancients and in the words of François de Clemery, Des Masures "Donne à penser que c'est mesme Virgile, / Qui soit vivant resuscité d'enfer" (1650:273). This is seen in the text when TROIUS HEROS

¹² E.g. PEDEMQUE ADVERTERE RIPAE is rendered *Taschans le pied venir mettre à la rive* cf. Perrin who uses *approcher*; CONTINUO becomes *Incontinent*, cf. Perrin's *Aussy tost*; ADVERSO becomes *qui s'oppose* while in Perrin it is omitted.

¹³ Du Bellay's simile (1549:24-25).

¹⁴ See Chopard (1984).

¹⁵ Identity of aim is indeed relevant as Virgil's Aeneid was written to flatter his patron, Augustus, of whom Aeneas was an ancestor.

¹⁶ See Worth-Stylianou (1999).

becomes *Le Troyen Prince*, an epithet more relevant to society in the French Renaissance. The portrayal of Dido is a most striking example of such transposition where Des Masures is kind to the queen of Carthage, while Perrin judges her actions (he freely adds the interpretative *cruelle*, *farouche*, *avec fureur* and his translation of INFELIX DIDO remains faithfully *O malheureuse Elise*, while Des Masures sympathetically interprets as *Povre Dido*). This demonstrates that it is entirely feasible that a translator should not translate purely in order to replicate the effect of the original, but rather to use his own translation to serve a different purpose.

The comparatively high prestige of translation at this time appears to permit a freer conception of the notion of translation than that assumed by today's translation theory. As Thomas states in her introduction to the 1972 reprint of the Des Masures translation, "...la traduction était un genre littéraire au sens plein du terme" (1972:vii). Translation could therefore encapsulate elements of creativity primarily seen in licensed expansion typical of sixteenth-century practice, and the art of translation was discussed by contemporary theorists alongside imitation (Worth 1988:3). It is evident, then, that translation in sixteenth-century France was not viewed as a process that by necessity involved loss. The potential for creativity and expansion at a general level results in translations vastly longer than their originals. Des Masures uses at times three lines to translate one single line of Latin, and Cary reminds us that another sixteenth-century translator, Amyot, once used three lines to describe the word 'tactique' (1963:20). The typographical set-up of Des Masures' translation again demonstrates the importance of the translated text by placing the original in a small type in the margin. The very presence of the Latin would have allowed appreciation of the translator's skills (despite his protests against arrogance

1560:5), so the translator clearly did not fear the readership noticing general loss in the translation.

The concept of translation loss is also demonstrably inapplicable at the very specific level, as illustrated by one of the most renowned features of sixteenth century French translation: binomials, which becomes a 'manie' according to Rickard (1968:13). Examples from Des Masures include IMAGO: ceste image, & le regard; RECENS A VULNERE: sa playe & dure bresche/ Estant encor toute recente & fresche. While the second pair here have very similar meanings (see Académie 1694), playe and bresche are quite different: Nicot (1606) translates the former as VULNUS, so it is clearly the standard translation while the latter has a more figurative, poetic use according to the Academy dictionary (1694). This process clearly demonstrates that the notions of generalisation and normalisation of vocabulary are inappropriate in this context because the meaning is only rendered more specific by the use of two independent words and variation is inherent in this process. The inclusion of standard and poetic terms seen above resists the accusation that translation uses mostly 'stilistisch neutralen' words (Levý 1969:111). Variation in vocabulary results in *la nasselle*¹⁷ used instead of *bateau*. It is important to note here that the use of binomials that will later be criticised by De Méziriac (1635/1998:10) and fall out of practice in the seventeenth century, is rooted in this particular century due to the expansion of the use of the vernacular. This illustrates the advantages of an historical analysis since this practice does indeed test several tenets of contemporary translation theory.

¹⁷ Nicot (1606) gives this as the correct translation of CYMBA, a word clearly associated with the Aeneid.

Close imitation of the Latin in this translation has already been evoked to weaken the claim for dynamic equivalence, but imitation also prevents a 'Logisieren' of the text which Levý (1969:117) expects to form part of the intellectualisation process. An example of this is seen in the use of colour terms where Des Masures, unlike Perrin, follows closely Virgil's usage resulting in the Sybil and Aeneas being left on the jarring bleu herbage du marais where Perrin has them simply being put à port; CAERULEAM used of the boat is similarly left out by Perrin while Des Masures has Du bateau bleu. Similarly NOCTISQUE SOPORAE becomes la nuict que le sommeil assomme; AT RAMUM HUNC (APERIT RAMUM QUI VESTE LATEBAT) is translated Lors le rameau, lequel estoit couvert/ Sous son habit, elle deskeuvre (sic.) & tire; ALLIGAT, & NOVIES STYX INTERFUSA COERCET becomes Et les contraint Styx, par neuf fois retorse, a construction so Latinate that it is rendered more complex. One final example aims at a Latinate sounding structure not through close translation of the Latin line, but by having three words constituting one whole line: Continuans l'encommencee addresse. Imitation of the Latin also affects morphology, where Latinate forms of names are used, such as Cerberus that will become Cerbere in Perrin's translation. All the above types of imitation represent significant exceptions to Levý's concept of intellectualisation, and although the seventeenth century saw a move away from such close imitation, the seventeenth century has its own particular features that call into question several aspects of contemporary translation theory.

3. Seventeenth-Century Translation Practice

In contrast to the linguistic elaboration of the sixteenth century, the seventeenth century can be characterised as a period "of increasing control and

regimentation of language" (Rickard 1974:104). It is in this century that are written the *Remarques* by Vaugelas (1647) and that the Académie Française is founded (1635), and the first edition of its dictionary is printed (1694). The influence of this normative tradition expands into translation practice with the creation of strong links between translation and grammar.¹⁸ This alters the motivation for translation, that moves away from the enrichment of French towards its codification; this only focuses the attention of the translator even further onto the French text, with expected liberty ensuing. This strong connection with purism turns the translated text into 'un modèle de style', ¹⁹ lessening the applicability of the notion of identity of aim. It is in this context that Perrin criticises Des Masures for following the Latin too closely, ²⁰ and that our seventeenth-century translator declares that he considers *les expressions françoises* more important.

Coupled with its potential as a tool for linguistic conformity, Perrin provides us with an example of translation used as a moral and political tool. Rather than a simple recreation of Virgil's classical text, Perrin's translation, hauled into the seventeenth century by explicit comparison of Roman conquest and French conquest in Germany,²¹ is turned into hard-line propaganda. This translation witnesses an extreme liberality in re-expression of the original, which for Kelly is the "essential variable" governing translation practice (1979:227). Additions to the text revolve around royalist sentiments with the living being banned from crossing the Styx *par nostre grand monarque* and many references to *empire, royaume, prison, le tronc de Justice* none of which find equivalents in the Latin. Further interpretation of the text betrays an obsession with fate and destiny: IRREMEABILIS UNDAE become *l'onde*

¹⁸ See Norton (1984:330).

¹⁹ See Zuber (1968,ch.II).

²⁰ Cf. Preface to de Tende (1660) who criticises un assujettissement qui approche de la servitude.

²¹ Preface to Perrin (1658).

fatale, compared to the literal l'eau qu'on ne repasse pas; URNAM becomes l'urne du sort. It is evident that the notion of dynamic equivalence cannot account for such patterns in this translation, since the effect to be produced on the readers of the day in no way echoed that produced on Virgil's original audience.

Before looking at text-specific features of seventeenth-century translation, it is important to note that the prestige of this art form had only increased since the sixteenth century, as Béarez Caravaggi notes with the example of D'Ablancourt who is praised "...comme l'un des maîtres les plus prestigieux et les plus sûrs dans l'art de bien écrire." (1983:183) on account only of his excellent translation. This high prestige awarded to translation allows attention to shift almost entirely onto the translated text which becomes an art form, as Henri Étienne states at the end of the sixteenth century.²² and De Méziriac laments the fact that translations are no longer considered in the light of the originals (1635/1998:5-6). By this time it was possible for the translation to be "plus belle que l'original" (Preface to De Tende 1660) as "a work of crafted imitation" (Worth-Stylaniou 1999:130), which is in stark contrast to today's assumption that translation by necessity involves loss. The specific system obtaining in seventeenth-century France demonstrates that translation loss is a concept not applicable to all periods and cultures. It is inconceivable that loss is encountered when close fidelity is not a requirement.²³

The normative tradition is not only significant in an analysis of the motivation for translation, but its effects on practice at the very specific level are also profound. It is in this light that Vaugelas' concepts of *pureté* and *netteté*. 24 themselves

²² Cited in Hulubei (1931:49).

²³ As evinced in the success of *Les Belles Infidèles*, cf. Mounin (1955).

²⁴ See Vaugelas (1647:567-593).

originating in antiquity, ²⁵ are of great importance. *Pureté* concerns lexical choice and correct grammatical usage while netteté concerns the higher level of arrangement of elements "...et tout ce qui contribuë à la clarté de l'expression" (Vaugelas 1647:567). It is in this light that the quest for le mot juste leads to the rejection of binomials, ²⁶ as evinced by Perrin's translation of RECENS A VULNERE as *Du coup* encor sanglante; and TANTAE PIETATIS IMAGO as 'Si cette pieté ne t'est considerable'. Here there is clearly specification in the meaning as the 'image of piety' becomes just 'pieté' itself; this is contrary to Levý's assumption that translation always involves generalisation and abstraction. De Tende in fact points to a need for specification in translation of some Latin texts "où il n'est parlé des choses qu'en General seulement" (1660:139-40). The importance of pureté leads to examples of specification in meaning and the choice of poetic terms in Perrin's translation: LONGO POST TEMPORE VISUM is translated as Dont depuis si long-temps ils n'avoient eu l'abord;²⁷ Cerberus is referred to as a mastin; the more learned Elise is used alongside *Didon*. Such tendencies prevent an analysis of translation involving normalisation of vocabulary, despite the reduction in the number of binomials. After the expansion of the 1560 translation, the concision of Perrin's is striking yet it is no more representative of the assumptions found in today's translation theory. This shows that while the remarkable use of binomials²⁸ not surprisingly escapes analysis according to standard translation theory, once French has moved on to the codification of the seventeenth century, translation practice still cannot be examined in light of much contemporary translation theory.

²⁵ From Quintilian, see Rickard (1992:39).

²⁶ Cf. De Méziriac (1635/1998:10).

²⁷ A quick survey of the dictionaries of this century confirms the rarity of the term 'abord' compared to 'voir', the cognate of VISUM.

²⁸ See Toury (1995:103-111) for an analysis of their role in confidence-building for young linguistic systems.

The concept of *netteté* is realised by less imitation of the Latin original, ²⁹ in the interests of *clarté*. 30 This increased freedom, coupled with concision, can be seen in many places in Perrin's translation: the earlier Sur quoy adong, pour respondre, s'est prise/ A dire en brief la Prophete d'Amphrise becomes ...répondit la prestresse; and the appearance of PHAEDRAM, PROCRINQUE is delayed for many lines by Perrin. Related to this is the contrast we notice between the 1560 and 1658 translation as regards learned references. Des Masures is happy to refer to the Sybil as la Prophete d'Amphrise and to the Mont de Marpese, while Perrin avoids such references, a liberty licensed by greater focus on the French text and its internal cohesion. This liberty does begin to surprise the modern reader when faced with examples such as the following: THESEA, PIRITHOUMQUE remain nameless in Perrin's text, being referred to as ces deux amys, le couple detestable; SISTE GRADUM, TEQUE ASPECTU NE SUBTRAHE NOSTRO./ QUE FUGIS? is very concisely, and loosely, translated as *Pourquoy fuir cruelle & pourquoy te celer?*; and at the very end of the section under examination, Dido's husband also remains nameless in the translation. Here the notion of intellectualisation is questioned because rather than explaining and expanding on the original, elements, and even entire constructions, are actually omitted in translation.

It has been seen that the importance of internal cohesion in the French translation licensed greater freedom, which moves translation somewhere closer to imitation, all the while maintaining a new level of discretion; in the words of De Tende "un juste temperamment, & une mediocrité raisonnable" (1660 Rule 8). Levý's concept of intellectualisation is once more in evidence here, but at a level above and beyond that assumed by his work. Perrin's entire translation is

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²⁹ This is only a tendency, however, as demonstrated by exceptions such as the imitation of the ablative absolute CUSTODE SEPULTO: *Le garde sommeillant*.

³⁰ Vaugelas condemns *equivoques* as "Le plus grand de tous les vices contre la netteté..." (1647:585).

accompanied by a vast number of marginal notes that provide an allegorical interpretation of the Aeneid, again revolving round human strife and fate. This is clearly well beyond the level of explanation accounted for by Levý, as discussed with reference to the portrayal of Dido. Similarly, individual textual examples show some extreme interpretation: AGGREDITUR DICTIS becomes *il les tance & parle en ce langage*; Dido is referred to as *sans couleur & sans voix*, and later *sans former de voix* is added to *elle s'échappe* and Aeneas speaks to her in words *de tendresse*, none of which feature in the Latin.

4. Conclusion

This analysis of translation practice in the Early Modern period in France has not only turned this area into less of the "terra incognita" that Lebègue (1952:24) discusses, but it has also demonstrated deficiencies in several tenets of contemporary translation theory. Faced with such proof of the inapplicability of some common assumptions we must either dismiss these translations as too removed from today's concept, or specify that contemporary translation theory accounts for translation in a restricted time and place. Given that the translations examined were considered by contemporaries to be translations, it is clearly not desirable to exclude them from analysis. It is also unfeasible that we should reject contemporary translation theory merely because of its specificity.

I suggest therefore that differences in practice and assumptions seen throughout this essay are explicable if, and only if, our translation theory accepts the primacy of the status of translation within the target culture as a governing-factor. As Norton concludes: "Every translation was bound, by fate, to be a new performance, an undulating instant in the cultural and linguistic tide that was the unity of human

consciousness." (1984:336). Any translation theory must therefore be able to encompass the different performative events represented by each translation. By placing translation on a cline between transliteration and imitation, we can account for differences in practice, still maintaining one phenomenon, translation, accounted for by one theory. Such a move ironically results in the acknowledgement of the Renaissance conception of translation in close relation to imitation and transliteration; these early scholars had at their disposal a more extensive critical apparatus in a range of terms: translatio, traducere, conversio, interpres, phrasis etc. (Norton ibid.)

The most striking difference between the Early Modern period in France and the age and culture upon which much contemporary translation theory is based is the difference in the status of translation. The negative concept of translation loss and the elusive dynamic equivalence are evidently inapplicable to the period analysed here due to the fundamental assumption that translation is a second-rate art form. Not only were we far from Duff's assumption that 'it sounds wrong' and from his assumption that the reader will always prefer the original (1981:xi), but this high art form was also closely linked to grammar and became a normative tool in the seventeenth century. It is not surprising that the concept of translation loss grows out of our culture and age when translation has neither high prestige nor wide exposure in society: this underlines once more the link between cultural and temporal conditioning that determines our methodology; the importance of diachronic and 'diacultural' study becomes all the more evident.

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