VISIBLE VIOLENCE
Mapping out Visibility in Translation Studies

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INTRODUCTION

- Translation studies and practice in the liberal arts setting.
  - What we do
  - Our approach(es) to teaching translation: listening to the foreign
  - Our approach(es) to translation: how to be visible?
Linguistic / Positivist Approaches

- Unit of translation = the word
- Standard “equivalence” based on “tertium comparationis. It “guarantees” that every word used in a translation is equivalent to every word in the original text.
- Problem = even if we accept this premise, “tertium comparationis” does not account for the “effect” of texts on their target readership
- After it becomes clear that machine translation proves to be less successful than initially expected
  - Unit of translation = text
  - Standard / problem = many of these “scientific” translators still seem to cling to some kind of “tertium comparationis” standard by which they judge different translations of a text (by comparing them to the original, usually)
Early Iconoclasts. Translation as Reading and Rewriting

- Miguel de Cervantes.
  - *Don Quixote* (1605)
    - Cide Hamete Benengeli
- Denis Diderot
  - *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772) initially, a translation of Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* (1728)
  - *Jacques le fataliste* (1765-1780) (Reading *Tristram Shandy*, Laurence Sterne)
Early Iconoclasts. Walter Benjamin

- Walter Benjamin, *Task of the Translator* (1923)
- Conceptually rich
  - *Untranslatability: the unattainable, the mysterious, the poetic.*
  - *Pure language: anterior to languages.*
  - *Afterlife of a work: translation supplements the original*
  - *Foreignizing a translation: “Germanizing the Sanskrit or Sanskritizing the German”*
Early Iconoclasts. Jorge Luis Borges

- Jorge Luis Borges.
  - “Las dos maneras de traducir” (“Two Approaches to Translation”) (1922)
  - “Las versiones homéricas” (“Some Versions of Homer”--Translated by Suzanne Jill Levine) (1932)
  - “Los traductores de Las mil y una noches” (“The Translators of One Thousand and One Nights” (1936)
  - “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” (“Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote”--Translated by Anthony Bonner) (1939)
Conceptual Precursors to the “Cultural Turn”

- Archeology of Translation Studies. Confronts the idea of translation in the shadows. Translation now visible through this meta-reflection. (Antoine Berman, 1984)
- Interdisciplinarity of Translation Studies: linguistics, psychoanalysis, ethnography. (Antoine Berman) Poetics (Henri Meschonnic)
- Ethical turn in translation studies: non-ethnocentric translations (Berman)
The “Cultural Turn”

- Unit of translation = culture
- Implications: Time and power as significant factors
  - Standards of what constitutes a good translation change over time
  - Changes are often related to power and its impact on the production of culture

- Contentions:
  - Translation = always a manipulation of the original text
  - Equivalence must be redefined
  - Translators must be aware of their power
Invisibility - Venuti

- The Regime of Fluency
  - *Translations into English (British & American) are most valued for their “fluency”*
  - *Illusion of transparency*

- *Characteristics of the “fluent” translation:*
  - written in modern, standard, non specialized English
  - uses a familiarized, “domesticated” syntax
  - it makes the translator (and her domesticating work) invisible
Invisibility. Cont.

- Consequences of invisibility:
  - *The foreign text is rewritten according to English-language cultural values and ideals*
  - *Texts selected for translation are those that are more amenable to fluent translating*
  - *The translator is marginalized both culturally (they don’t get credit for their work) and economically (they often enter “work-for-hire” contracts that strip them of most copyright guarantees—small changes since the 1980s, p. 10-11)*
Violence-Venuti

- Translation = Violence (manipulation):
  - *The foreign text is reconstituted according to:*
    - New linguistic rules
    - Strength of the translator’s interpretation
    - Domestic cultural values and beliefs
  - *Values and beliefs, in turn, determine a translation’s:*
    - Production
    - Circulation
    - Reception
Violence. Cont.

- Power of translators = they can choose the direction of this violence
  - Ethnocentric violence prevalent in British and US American cultures
    - Discursive strategy = fluency
    - Ethical attitude = domesticating practice
  - Against the ethnocentric violence of translation, thus working against ethnocentrism/racism and cultural narcissism/imperialism by creating new conditions of readability
    - Discursive strategy = “resistancy”
    - Ethical attitude = foreignizing practice
The “Cultural Turn.”
Approaches and Strategies

- “Faithfulness” to the original is judged not according to “equivalence” (of words or texts), but according to function (the original and the translated text should have a similar function in their respective culture)—Bassnett and Lefevere.

- Rhythm: locating a continuous voice, anterior to the source text and structures it.
Approaches and Strategies. Cont.

- Symptomatic Reading (Venuti)
  - *It locates discontinuities at the level of diction, syntax or discourse that reveal the translation to be a violent rewriting of the foreign text*
  
  - *It can be useful to demystify the illusion of transparency*

  - *Both domesticating and foreignizing translations are equally partial in their interpretation of the foreign text; but the first one conceals it while the second one flaunts it*
Treatise on Man
René Descartes

“...l’âme sera dans le cerveau comme le fontanier qui doit être dans les regards...”

“a rational soul [...] will reside there like the fountain-keeper who must be stationed at the cavities/tanks [peepholes]...”
Approaches and Strategies. Cont.

- Functional equivalence. (André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett: Function as standard). This often requires that the translator alter the original, sometimes in significant ways:
  - transformation
  - appropriation
  - mimicry

- Translators with a feminist, postcolonial, and /or queer agenda “visibly” and “violently” use these strategies in order to subvert dominant cultural values and to promote alternative ones.
Postcolonial Strategies

Gayatri Spivak reflects on her own process in translating 18th C Bengali poetry:

*I must overcome what I was taught in school: the highest mark for the most accurate collection of synonyms, strung together in the most proximate syntax. I must resist both the solemnity of chaste Victorian poetic prose and the forced simplicity of “plain English,” that have imposed themselves as the norm ... Translation is the most intimate act of reading. I surrender to the text when I translate. These songs, sung day after day in family chorus before clear memory began, have a peculiar intimacy for me. Reading and surrendering take on new meanings in such case. The translator earns permission to transgress from the trace of the other--before memory--in the closest places of the self. (Quoted in Outside in the Teaching Machine, 180)
Feminist Strategies

- Feminist translations: “appropriated and adapted techniques of the writings they translate.”

- Examples of feminist manipulation
  - Prefacing /Footnoting
  - Supplementing
    - Nicole Brossard, *L’Amer*
    - *Barbara Godard* These our Mothers

- Hijacking (term comes from a critique of feminist translation)
  - Nicole Brossard, “Ce soir, j’entre dans l’histoire sans relever ma jupe.”
  - *Linda Gaborieau*, “This evening I’m entering history without opening my legs.”
  - Gendered “Quebecoises” in lieu of the neutral English term.
Queer Strategies

Elizabeth Sara Lewis analyzes subtitles for Gia (1998): Scene where the lesbian protagonist introduces her girlfriend to her mother—how to translate “girlfriend” into Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese in order to preserve the visibility of the queer.

**Gia:** This is my, uh, girlfriend, Linda
[lines omitted]

**Kathleen:** So what else is going on, huh?
Do you have a boyfriend?

**Gia:** Uh, no. Linda has a boyfriend

**Kathleen:** Oh, yeah? Well, that’s nice

**Gia:** I have a girlfriend

**Kathleen:** Oh, yeah, that’s nice too...
though is not the same thing, is it?

/ Esta es mi amiga, Linda

/ ¿Qué otras novedades tienes?

/ ¿Tienes novio?

/ No. Linda tiene novio

/ ¿Sí? Qué bien

/ Yo tengo una amiga

/ Sí, eso también está bien

/ aunque no es lo mismo, ¿verdad?
Translator and her Violent Visibility

- Consequences of this new ethnographic/foreignizing translation
  - De-glorifies the source text.
    - Bible: Adam: ha’adam - humankind | adama - earth
  - Politics of Translation (Spivak)
  - Enrichment of target language by deterritorizing target language

- Learn from these feminist and queer translations: dare to be resistant, aggressive, and creative writers. (Borges, Paz, and Flotow)
  - Translations liberated from excessive fidelity in a process of “capturing, and performing rape and incest” on the text. (Serge Gavronsky, qtd. in Luise Flotow, note 82)
References

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- Cervantes, Miguel de. El ingenuoso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha (I), 1605.
References. Cont.

- Lewis, Elizabeth Sara. “‘This is My Girlfriend, Linda.’ Translating Queer Relationships in Film.” *In Other Words… The Journal for Literary Translators*. Winter 2010 (36), 3-22.
Here is the bright, young food co-op.
Here is the steeple. Here are the royals
not yet dead. Here are the Niggas With
Amethyst crystals. Shea butter
halos orbit half-shaved heads bowed
for vindication. Our mother patchouli
who art in the apothecary on Flatbush
hallowed be your Dutch wax dress.
Give us this day we light soy candles
for dead brothers. Give us this day we soak
our supremacy wounds.
Give us this day.
Give us fresh juice green
as avocados, and strength
to dismantle Fox news. We are marching
even in our sleep. We are reading
DuBois, getting high off the salt eaters.