TRANSLATION THEORY TODAY
A Call for Transfer Theory *

ITAMAR EVEN-ZOHAR

Poetics and Comparative Literature, Tel Aviv

How many times have we been tortured by the cliches of the uninitiated, veteran or novice, that translation is never equal to the original, that languages differ from one another, that culture is "also" involved with translation procedures, that when a translation is "exact" it tends to be "literal" and hence loses the "spirit" of the original, that the "meaning" of a text means both "content" and "style," and so on. Not to speak of such approaches where norms are either overtly or covertly stated, i.e., where we are told how translations should look or how they should be conceived of in terms of one or another evaluative norm. This does not happen only at such conferences where innocent translators, never before exposed to contemporary knowledge, rediscover with great amazement time-honored commonplaces. It may very well occur even when so-called professionals meet together. Obviously, this is caused partly by simple ignorance: as with medicine, literature and child psychology, everybody is an expert without even suspecting that there are things to be studied. Advanced translation studies are accessible as yet only to a relatively small number of professionals. But when we speak of "translation theory today," it does not seem valuable to waste time reviewing everything that is being published in the field. It is rather that body of hypotheses which is now crystallizing and which may constitute a more developed theory that I believe worthwhile to consider, no matter how little known it may be. There has recently evolved a set of hypotheses which analyzes translation in the context of the sign-system mechanism of human production rather than in terms of isolated verbal, literary, stylistic or cultural types. Moreover, it seems that a kind of functional approach is gaining ground in which the aggregate of hypothesized functions within the verbal sign

systems is conceived of as dynamic, i.e., historical, and heterogeneous. In contrast, the a-historical concept of system (structure), as isolated from other semiotic co-systems, and analyzed in terms of homogeneity seems to be gradually losing ground. As a result new questions arise, and, what is more important, old questions can be asked again. Doing this does not mean to tediously perpetuate that ceremonial act where one always starts from the very beginning, as if nothing has been done before. As we know, there is a difference between innocent questions and those produced by previous knowledge. The possibility of raising such questions in translation studies seems in itself to be a sign of some advancement, and must be taken as such rather than as a desire to revolutionize the field just for the fun of it. On the other hand, research carried out with the more advanced hypotheses has disclosed how many riddles there are yet to be solved once the old concepts are given up. Thus, the reformulation of theoretical concepts obviously does not stay within the borders of theory alone: it has immediate bearings on the object of studies, and clearly should be appreciated on that basis.

Rewriting now for the nth time my private version of translation theory, several questions turned up in my problem file. I intend to discuss some of them briefly in this paper in the hope that this may contribute to our knowledge in regard to where we stand. At least I would like to know where I stand, if at all.

II

Our accumulated knowledge about translation indicates more and more that translational procedures between two systems (language/literatures) are in principle analogous, even homologous, with transfers of various kinds within the borders of the system. As systems are no longer conceived of as homogeneous, static structures, transfer mechanisms, that is, the procedures by which textual models in one system are tranferred to another, from canonized to non-canonized literature for example, constitute a major feature of systems. This has been, at least generally, formulated before, notably by Jakobson (1959), but no consequences were ever drawn for translation theory. Can we stick to this practice, or would it be wiser to acknowledge the implicit practice whereby translation is discussed in terms of transfer and vice versa? In other words, would it be profitable to establish a transfer theory, and if so, where will inter-systemic translation be located, and with what consequences?

My answer is that even if we are unaware of the fact that we discuss translation in terms of transfers and vice versa, sooner or later it will turn out to be uneconomical to deal with them separately. When, for instance, we say in translation theory that under certain circumstances secondary models are more likely to be operating with literary translation because more often than not translated literature occupies a peripheral position within the literary PS and more often than not peripheries use secondary models, the problem of what we will call the "secondarization" of primary models is also present. If we are fond of terminological games, we could then easily say that "secondarization" is clearly involved with translational procedures while, on the other hand,

translation of en involves "secondarization" of primary models. But aside from proverbial beauty thus achieved, it does not seem to be very illuminating, not because it does not point at any valid hypotheses but because they are not logical (or empirical) opposites. As a consequence, the lack of an explicitly formulated transfer theory simply creates the following situation: (a) One section of phenomena homologous with another is dealt with as an object of study while the other is not recognized as such and therefore is taken casually, as if belonging to an altogether different semiotic set; (b) general procedures, valid in various co-systems, are conceived of as particular, i.e., pertaining only to an officially recognized section. This results not only in exaggerated non-proportional perspectives but hinders the discovery of what the particular procedures, after the general ones have been eliminated, really are.

On the other hand, there is always the danger that by making generalizations too gross, and if a transfer theory is developed from translation theory, the relatively solid body of questions already in existence will be lost. Maybe it would be better then to stick to our reduced theory, knowing it is not adequate; the alternative may be worse. This is a legitimate approach, especially for emerging disciplines, but I am deeply convinced that at our present stage in translation theory, we simply do not have much choice. As we now possess a number of hypotheses on the function of PS parameters for inter-systemic translation, and since some of these parameters turn out to be of translational nature, it does not seem possible, unless we go back to a previous stage, to avoid discussing transfer procedures.

If this is the case, translation theory as it is today clearly is not a candidate for liquidation. On the contrary, it will become even clearer that "translation" is not a marginal procedure of cultural systems. Secondly, it will help in looking for the really particular in inter-systemic transfer (translation). Thirdly, it will change our conception of the translated text in such a way that we may perhaps be liberated from certain postulated criteria. And fourthly, it may help in locating what "translational procedures" consist of.

Let me now discuss in some detail the third and the fourth points. Our practice with products of translation has been rather selective, and, ultimately, inconsistent from a theoretical point of view. For the sake of a neat theory, we accepted, on the one hand, the fact that translation involves reformulation of an utterance a in a language A by means of an utterance b in a language B. Thus, the process of decomposition and recomposition between two utterances in two different languages was admitted to be of a translational nature. On the other hand, however, when the result of this translation did not conform with pre-postulated relations, such as that there be no overt omission/amplification, the product of translation was considered not translation but "adaptation" or "imitation" and pushed outside the realm of translation theory. As no case is ever quite so neat, there accumulated such a heap of "non-translational translations" that if we had bothered to make some raw statistics, we would have discovered that most products of translation are out of bounds for translation theory. This had been, admittedly, a legitimate way to elaborate a solid ensemble

of concepts for discussing translation, but it is now an obstacle to further development. It isolates translated texts from too many other kinds of texts, and it consequently does not allow translation theory to attempt to solve a greater number of riddles in the data accessible to it.

To put it in question-and-answer form, this is what we get:

Will translated texts be recognized as translations only when produced according to certain pre-postulated SL-TL relations?

The answer is: No. All products of translational procedures will be dealt with as translations (with no normative conclusions drawn).

Two implications follow from this position:

(1)   The problem of translatability must be reformulated. It is of no great value to discover in what sections of semiosis reproduction is of high or low probability, or that it is always of a lower probability than an utterance identical with the original. The relevant question seems rather to be under what circumstances, and in what particular way, a target utterance/text b is relatable to a source utterance/text a. Thus, the hypothesis of "correspondence" is reverted to. We need no longer ask "why a certain feature x in ST a is given no correspondence in TTb," but "in what sense, and why, a feature x_1 in a TT b is relatable to feature x in ST a?"

(2)   As translational procedures produce certain products in a target system, and as we have accepted *all* sorts of S system-T system relations for these products, it must be admitted that this does not apply only to actualized texts, but also to competenced ones, i.e., to general models. By failing to realize this, translation theories were prevented from observing, just to take one instance, the intricate process by which a particular text is translated in accordance with those TS models domesticated by model appropriation, carried out by translational procedures. So far, actual text translations have only been admitted as legitimate objects for theoretical induction, while the whole intricate problem of system interference, through which models are transplanted from one system to another, has been ignored. From the point of view of the general transfer theory called for, it does not make sense to regard penetration of a system A into a system B as "influence," while regarding the reformulation of texts belonging to the same system A by system B as "translation." It reflects speculative habits based supposedly on the more overt segmentation of data, but it is incompatible with our more advanced hypotheses in poetics and the semiotics of culture.

Let us now go back to the fourth point, i.e., to the question "what does translational procedure mean"?

As odd as it may seem, the notion of translationality is not too clear in translation theory. Much effort has been made to describe the respective possibilities and preferences, in short, the repertories, of respective systems (languages, literatures). But even the most minute analysis of those repertories could never explain the actual behavior of translation under various circumstances. For instance, when a certain function in system A happens to be lacking in system B, one could explain why it does not show in the language-B-text when it is a TT. But when, in spite of its existence in the TL it

does not show in the TT, or, in spite of its *non*-existence, it does show (as a result of interference), one has no explanation. No doubt, a contrastive analysis *per se*, especially if it is carried out on the level of language only, does not explain more than what options there might be in translation. But if one wants to discover what *constraints* might have produced a certain behavior/product, it is necessary to find out the hierarchical relations between the various constraints, as well as to recognize that under certain circumstances constraints may operate not only in selecting from among established options, but in producing options which did *not* exist before. It is only when systems are conceived of as homogeneous, static, and closed that such an understanding can not prevail. Hopefully, this is no longer the case.

What do we know about constraints hierarchy, and which factors may function as such? Do we agree at all on the very concept of constraint to begin with? For instance, is language structure to be taken as a constraint, or would it be more economical from the point of view of theory to consider only those factors which operate when various options are available?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, one thing seems clear, and that is that it has not been proved that the so-called "lower levels" of a target system are stronger constraints than "upper levels." Thus, to take not too "low" an item, standardized word order, i.e., a lingual model, is not necessarily stronger than a model of "replique" in a novel, if certain features neutralize the "standard" ("normal") word order and impose different rules. In the literary text (but not only there) literary functions may neutralize standardized "language" functions and replace them with non-standardized ones, if there is no rejection mechanism to prevent it. Such phenomena can no longer be dismissed as "abuse" of language or "misbehavior": they are there, and they may even constitute the central processing principle of a certain type of texts. As a result, "language" may have changed under their pressure, rather than vice versa. When one observes the multitude of cases where no explanation is available on the basis of either "low" or "local" decision factors, one must admit that global models, whether explicitly formulated or implicitly built-in patterns, are probably stronger constraints on translational behavior, and hence a more adequate explanation for the TT features.

How then can translational procedure be conceived of? Is "translational" to be understood just as the principle of transfer, the behavior and the result of which is determined by the complex relations between a Source system and a Target system, i.e., not "by itself"? If so, does it mean that with the exception of this principle, all the rest of translation theory is merely scraped together from interference theory, contrastive linguistics or semiotics, etc.?

I can think of two answers to these questions.

First, the fact that most of the hypotheses of translation theory are borrowed from other branches, such as interference theory, or contrastive poetics (if there is such a thing), does not mean that we accept what we have long rejected, i.e., that there is no autonomous discipline of translation studies. The eclectic character of many of the particular translation theories resulted not from that

fact, but from the fact that the various hypotheses were not subjugated to any hypothesis on the principle of translation. Hence, one could not make any conjectures on any of the functions involved. But once translation is conceived of as a specific systemic principle, i.e., a parameter of systemic manipulation, or processing, the conglomerate of disciplines becomes a separate discipline.

Secondly, translationality is not only a principle of processing, the results of which are determined by the semiotic constraints operating on the systemic/inter-systemic level. It is also a general process, the results of which are produced by its own nature. This is undoubtedly the most evasive hypothesis, but unless it is acknowledged, some unexplained data will always remain. In a previous work (Even-Zohar, 1971), I maintained that under translation behavior patterns operate which are inexplicable in terms of any of the repertories involved. The principle of translational processing *per se* clearly implies some procedures depending on it. Not all cases of amplification/reduction, implication/explication, simplification/complication are produced by the governing models/norms of the TS (or any section thereof). All students of translation actually admit that the very activity of translating directs any individual, even before (logically, not temporally) systemic constraints impose themselves, to make certain decisions resulting from the unavoidable mechanism involved in decomposition/recomposition. This may sound trivial, and perhaps superfluous from the point of view of functional theory, but I do not think that this is the case. Only if translationality, i.e., translational procedure, is recognized as an active constraint, too, will it, perhaps, be possible to locate more precisely those inter- or intra-systemic factors operating, to explain either general or individual patterns of behavior.

III

At this point I believe there is no need to go on raising questions. I think I have demonstrated my point, and surely a positive or negative decision must be reached regarding the hypotheses suggested by those who intend to use this paper for theory formation. But in order to make my points as unambiguous as possible, so that they can serve such a purpose, I will present a set of translation/transfer hypotheses, both based on the above discussion and derived from it. These will be labeled "transfer/translation rules." When necessary, points discussed in other works of mine and not discussed here will be made use of.

Hyp. No. 1. Translation theory would be more adequate if it were to become part of general transfer theory, to which it will contribute.

Hyp. No. 2. Inter-systemic and intra-systemic transfers will be regarded as homologous.

Hyp. No. 3. The product of transfer, i.e., the translated utterance/text, will *not* be admitted as such if and only if certain pre-postulated SL-TL relations are fulfilled.

Hyp. No. 4. As a transferred product, not only actual texts for which a particular

(individual) S text-T text relation can be demonstrated will be considered, but also T texts traceable to a specific, or several, S *models.*

Hyp. No. 5. For the ST-TT relation, traditionally described in terms of correspondence/non-correspondence, the question "how and why TT features are relatable to ST features" will replace the question "[why] in TT a certain ST feature is lacking."

Hyp. No. 6. In transfer/translation, the transfer principle will be taken as a procedure, which due to the decomposition/recomposition unavoidably involved in it, processes the utterances/texts so that they behave differently from the source.

Hyp. No. 7. This translational procedure (Hyp. 6) is only the most basic processing principle for a TT. The specifics of that processing are determined by a complex hierarchy of semiotic constraints, the strongest being models governed by the positional oppositions within the target PS.

Hyp. No. 8. Under the TS constraints, the relatability of a TT to a ST, or of T model to a S model, depends on the state of the target PS, which, through the repertory of its models, functions as the strongest constraint.

(An example for the PS state-dependent constraints vis-à-vis S system: if T PS is weak [Even-Zohar 1978] vis-à-vis S PS, then non-existent functions may be domesticated, thus making a higher relatability possible, on condition that the position of the translated system within the PS is central, and if the two parameters are compatible, primary models are accessible.)

Hyp. No. 9. (This is a tentative comprehensive rule of trans.) In a TS *B*, either within the same PS or in a different PS, depending on whether it is stable/in crisis and strong/weak vis-à-vis S system *A*, a TT (TM) *b* will be produced according to transfer procedures plus the constraints imposed upon them by the intra-T PS relations, both governing and governed by the T PS repertory of existing and non-existing models.

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