

ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПЕРЕВОДА ФИЛОСОФСКИХ И СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ТЕКСТОВ

TRANSLATING PHILOSOPHY

In the history of Western culture, the relationship between philosophy and translation has not drawn too much attention, even though, since Cicero (106–43 BC) translating into Latin, orally and from memory, Hellenistic philosophy, were connected. However, this relationship began to be more dynamic a few decades ago when philosophers questioned more systematically language and meaning, logic and truth.

For a long time, the belief that form and content, or language and thought, are independent from one another was widespread. The idea of translation relying on the possibility of univocal meaning was compatible with that basic assumption of Western metaphysics and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Language was viewed as a mere instrument for the expression or communication of stable meaning and translation as a transportation of meaning from one language to another, safely taken or delivered elsewhere, across linguistic borders. Such a conception in which meanings can be separated from words and translation is an impersonal transference of essential meaning has dominated in the West for more than two millennia, from the essentialism of the Platonic tradition to almost the present. This refusal to consider the translators' agency, to accept the productive character of the translator's activity disregarded the impact of translations on the construction of identity and cultural relations, on the dissemination of knowledge, and reinforced the prejudices about translation as a secondary, derivative form of writing, about translators' invisibility.

The critique of Western metaphysics, including Platonic thought, was undertaken by Frederic Nietzsche in the 1870s, connecting "the philosophical task with a radical reflection on language" (Foucault, 1966; Foucault, 1971), and was continued by Jacques Derrida in the 1960s–1970s. One can say that their critique was pivotal in the development of different trends in contemporary philosophy such as postmodern, poststructuralist thinking, deconstruction¹.

Concepts and meanings are constructed, and not to be discovered, uncovered. Because the historical, epistemological and ideological circumstances of their construction are never the same, they can never be fully reproduced, transferred as such. In other words, translation is an interpretation, a transformation, taking into account the asymmetries in the relationship between the domestic and the foreign, the power struggle between languages, cultures. Translators cannot avoid making decisions in their interpretations and the production of their translated texts. The new possibilities, opened up by the interface of contemporary philosophy and the study of translation, empower the role of the translators.

¹ Just to name a few thinkers, in an alphabetical order: Jean Baudrillard, Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Félix Guattari, Fredric Jameson, Duncan Kennedy, Douglas Kellner, Julia Kristeva, Jean-François Lyotard, Alun Muslow, Richard Rorty, thinkers of the Yale school (Paul de Man), etc.



In our project entitled “Translating Philosophy and Social Sciences” (2017–2019), we have emphasized studies on texts because philosophical texts can be considered halfway between expressive, literary texts and specialised, informative, operative texts. A philosophical text (or any cultural theoretical discourse) is both structuring an “object” and a structured content by way of saying, a rhetorical tradition (with discursive conventions, citations, references to genres such as essay, commentaries, points of view, etc.) and a given terminology (network of concepts, moving concepts across time and continents (see Cassin, 2004; Cassin, 2014). Textual norms and traditions, phraseology, keywords... help to a certain extent readers to comprehend, contextualize “new” texts. The five articles, submitted to *Slovo*, reflect some of our concerns and issues raised during the project (two articles will be published in the next issue). But we are aware that translating philosophy demands much more research – Who decides what must be translated? What are the functions of the publisher, the series editor, the copyeditor, the proofreader, etc. in the process of importing, distributing certain philosophical texts, in the selection and accessibility of new philosophers? What are the steps between identifying a text as relevant, innovative, publishing excerpts in a specialised journal and/or an anthology, acquiring the rights for an international readership... and the integration of a translated book in the intellectual local field of reception? What does retranslation of a philosophical text mean? What are the implications when a philosopher opts for self-translating his/her own production, or his/her texts in a foreign language are the results of an indirect translation? Do translators of philosophical texts need specific competences, specific knowledge and/or a particular empathy with the source texts? Are paratexts (notes, preface, introduction, blurb, book reviews, interviews, etc.) quite significant in the reception of a translation, in the legitimation and canonisation of a philosopher in a foreign background? What are the translation units, the translation strategies when translating a philosophical text? Is there a link between untranslatability and self-censorship? Of course, the focus could be on a type of philosophy (metaphysics, philosophy of sciences, ethics, logic, etc.), on a school or a trend (analytical philosophy, French Theory, phenomenology, etc.), on an author (Descartes, Kant, Sartre, Levinas, Habermas, etc.), on a period of time (existentialism between 1945 and 1970, etc.). All these questions are asked within Western tradition in which philosophy remains always problematic but no one should forget the exchanges between this tradition and the Chinese, Japanese, Islamic traditions: is there a universal definition of philosophy?

References

1. Cassin, B. and Apter, E.S., eds., 2004. *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: dictionnaire des intraduisibles*. Paris.
2. Cassin, B. and Apter, E.S., eds., 2014. *Dictionary of Untranslatables. A Philosophical Lexicon*. Princeton UP.
3. Foucault, M., 1966. *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris.
4. Foucault, M., 1971. *The Order of Things – An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York.