

REVIEW

Tong King Lee: APPLIED TRANSLATION STUDIES. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018

To begin, this book provides the student of the field with a comprehensive and concise panorama of its applications across the closely intertwined paradigms of equivalence, function, and discourse (Chapters 1–4). For the general reader in Applied Linguistics, it serves as an analogy for how to converge on discussions, say, in Second Language Acquisition, where theoretical differences too often unnecessarily derail productive problem-solving, even about theoretical models.

As a survey, the book covers a broad swath of approaches to the study of language contact, as it is revealed in translation: from the practical issues of the applied subfield to the radical postmodern proposals of Judith Butler (in Chapter 5). The reader should not despair upon noting that the various perspectives on translation that are discussed cannot all be consistent one with every other; actually, most of the paradigms reviewed in the book are entirely compatible with an overarching theory and practice. Here, the unifying conception flows from a special kind of cross-language context dependence. But there will inevitably be some outliers. One of the purposes of the book is to present the debates and contradictions as they are, and let the reader decide. Appropriately, fair treatment is accorded to all.

The wide range of genres and text types that are taken up for problem-solving illustrates how decisions about negotiating this special instance of bilingual interaction calls upon a serious analysis of all relevant intervening variables. The overarching framework is from cross-language pragmatics. According to Lee, the bilingual interface in successful translation must, by necessity, account for how context intervenes in communication from source language to target language. This idea applies to every scenario of translation.

In Chapters 2 and 3 attention is given to the exceptional considerations of translating creative writing. Readers curious about this most challenging of language contact problem should cover these chapters together with the author's earlier study on how verse forms draw on bilingual interaction in modern and experimental poetry (Lee 2015). There seem to be two requirements, at counter purposes on first glance:

- the translator's need to focus on form, so as to preserve the aesthetic patterns that reside in the wording itself. Verbal art is 'inscribed within the formal structures' (Chapter 2, p. 62). These structures start at the beginning with the figures and contours of sound. But then,
- the poem, as an expressive text, calls for translation capable of evoking in readers of the new poem, in essence, the sensation of its artistry taken as

an integrated object of reflection, integrating all of its levels into a unified totality.

The apparent counterpurposes arise from poetry's dependence, on the one hand, on the language as a grammatical system, and, on the other hand, its drive by necessity to disrupt and deform the same language forms, the requirement to systematically effect *estrangement* (p. 166). Great poetry is 'obscure and imprecise', offering little in the way of 'paraphrasable content' (Yeh 1992).

Thus, in this genre it is hard to imagine translation without native or near-native linguistic competence in the source text language *and* specialized poetic mastery and sensibility. The linguistic configurations are usually specific to the source language, and meaning is obscure. But then the most famous case of verse translation under these exceptional circumstances, instance that we can take as the ultimate test case, is Ezra Pound's *Cathay*, where the first requirement was not met. Without knowledge of Chinese, he worked from the notes of Japanese language scholar Ernest Fenollosa. Space does not allow us to take up the controversy in any detail. It will suffice to make reference to Yip's (1969) authoritative study: while from the analytical point of view, *Cathay* may serve students of the poems poorly for getting an understanding and appreciation of the original texts, Pound's rendering of their verbal artistry counts as a legitimate recitation, recreated in English. The recital in this case aims at representing the aesthetic core of the poems.

We can suggest here that the translation of poetry presents the scenario of rewriting in a way that is similar to the guidelines of *interpretation* discussed at length in Chapter 2 regarding Bible translation (and by extension that of all religious texts). The same consideration applies to genres that present a similar translation problem, of how they can be *received cross-culturally* in the target language community. These two genres, with their complex and interacting constraints, thus present us with the most difficult and interesting problems.

Related to these questions, regarding the specter of untranslatability, some reasonable advice is offered to young professionals starting out in their career: that they should not take this idea too seriously. The language pair of greatest disparity, from the two most divergent cultures, where one or the other does not share the same inherited foundations of human cognition has yet to be discovered by anthropologists. Languages, for their part, differ, but not without limit.

Chapter 4 points to a problem in how we should evaluate opposing theoretical models. This comes up in an extensive discussion of Michael Halliday's conceptions and how they apply to translation, noting in passing that they are commonly taken as being in counterposition to concepts associated with Universal Grammar (UG). The problem is interesting because especially in Applied Linguistics the theoretical differences can often be set aside. This is because, in the case of translation (as in others), the relevant domains of language ability can often be kept separate. For all the examples presented in the book, we can even venture to say that the overall approach of either model

(UG and Halliday's communicative and discourse-oriented theory) should be able to complement the other. I could not find an exception to this possibility. For a case in point, UG has little to say about questions specific to discourse analysis, or even about applied problems in translation at the sentence-grammar level. What this complementary relationship allows for is an opportunity to step back and recognize where common ground can be established, a reflection that is indispensable for picking up the debate again on scientific questions (applied and theoretical) where fundamental differences remain, and where indeed the two models cannot both be correct.

An important theme of the book is the relationship between the applied paradigms and conceptual theories in translation studies, the mutually productive communication between the 'how' (the craft and the methods) and the 'why' (understanding the broader context of language contact). A central arena for this collaboration is the translation of historic texts from indigenous cultures, as they came into contact with alphabetic literate cultures. The translation usually required the additional prior phase of transcription from the oral tradition (the exceptions, involving translation from ancient writing systems, are even more interesting). How 'faithful' were the very transcriptions, new source text for translation? Under what conditions of (sometimes extreme) asymmetry, of different kinds, were they recorded? But at the same time, in particular considering the artistic genres, the 'distorted' transcriptions/translations could also be taken as new creations, legitimate *recitals* in their own right, a proposal made by León-Portilla (1996), foremost scholar of Pre-Colombian Aztec literature, and of course this asymmetry does not only apply to historical documents. The applied and the conceptual truly maintain a close interaction.

What seems like a sub-field of the latter is introduced in Chapter 5 (the 'systems paradigm') among whose more radical exponents we might more accurately characterize as '(anti-)system', which in turn proclaim an explicit political agenda. Here, translation becomes a site of ideological struggle and political action that can even overturn the most basic assumptions of equivalence, function, and discourse, and what words can (or should not) mean. This controversy is of an entirely different order, for another time. In the meanwhile, on the idea of subverting language forms, the guidelines of the equivalence paradigm (from Chapter 2) might still be relevant. For instance, authors should first check the elementary facts of syntax and morphology. To take an example mentioned in Chapter 5: *history* ≠ *his* + *story*. The imposition upon the English language in this case was from the Norman Conquest: (lat.) *historia* → (fr.) *histoire*.¹ My own assessment is that, in the end, postmodern speculation in Applied Linguistics may have little consequence even for theoretical work on controversies in translation given its skepticism about the very idea of separate languages, that they exist amounting to little more than a 'pernicious myth' (Pennycook 2006: 62).

In concluding the final chapter, the discussion returns to the foundational conception of applied translation studies in how the three paradigms of equivalence, function, and discourse form an interactive system. Because

different levels and kinds of language analysis correspond to the (distinguishable yet interacting) domains of word formation, phrase and sentence pattern, and text/discourse pattern, we can avoid faux controversies that only distract us from interesting problems, both practical and theoretical.

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NOTE

1 The clever neologism 'herstory' may now, in turn, have become problematic in North American Cultural Studies for the use of the feminine pronoun. To be

clear, taking (*la*) *histoire* as an example, the alleged morpheme 'his' does not exist in French as indicating male sex or masculine grammatical gender.

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