Multilingualism as a challenge for translation studies

Reine Meylaerts

Traditional definitions considered translation, implicitly or explicitly, as the full transposition of one source language message by one target language message for the benefit of a monolingual target public. Accordingly, the translation process would transfer the source language message from the source culture into the target culture, translations thus taking place between linguistically and geographically separated cultures. Obviously this has been unmasked as an idealized construction and as too simple a conceptualization. Messages, people and societies are more often than not multilingual in themselves. Consequently, multilingualism, commonly defined as ‘the co-presence of two or more languages (in a society, text or individual)’ (Grutman 2009a: 182) is inextricably linked with translation. At the heart of multilingualism, we find translation. Translation is not taking place in between monolingual realities but rather within multilingual realities. In multilingual cultures (assuming there are such things as monolingual cultures), translation contributes to creating culture, in mutual exchange, resistance, interpenetration. The translational phenomena are likely to transcend the traditional notions of foreignness based on the postulate of a monolingual culture; they are the prolongation of the source messages, adding in turn to their significance (Simon 2006). Since the idea of a geographical transfer of the translated message becomes rather virtual, the distinction between ‘source’ and ‘target’ may lose part of its conceptual pertinence. Due to the relativity of geography as a distinctive cultural feature, translations, both as a process and as a product may also belong to the source culture. The latter may co-determine the translation initiative, the selection of material to translate, the translation strategies, the reception of the translations and the interruption of translation contacts (Meylaerts 2004). In short, questioning the binary opposition between a so-called source and target, translation in multilingual cultures discusses one of the key postulates of descriptive translation studies (see Ben-Ari, this volume): ‘translations are facts of the target culture’ (Toury 1995: 29).

It is only recently that the complex connections between multilingualism and translation have gained attention from translation studies. A simple search based on the keyword ‘multilingualism’ in Benjamin’s Translation Studies Bibliography shows how half of the publications related to translation and multilingualism between 1972 and 2010 have appeared during the last decade. They cover a vast array of methodologies, of fields and...
Multilingual texts

Research on multilingual texts has a solid tradition in literary studies. Literary multilingualism may take on numerous forms according to the quantity (one single word vs. entire passages) and the type of foreignisms used (dialects, sociolects, foreign languages, etc.). It can fulfil various functions in terms of plot construction, character discourse and behaviour, mimesis, etc. (cf. Schogt 1988; Stratford 2008). Literary multilingualism is an historical reality (Forster 1970; Stratford 2008), with Dante’s *Divina Commedia* (1304–21), Rabelais’s *Pantagruel* (1532), Lawrence Stern’s *Tristram Shandy* (1760), Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1868–9), Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), or Umberto Eco’s *Il nome della Rosa* (1980), just to name a few canonical examples. Still, nineteenth-century Romanticism and the romantic ideology of ‘one language and one literature for one nation’ gave it a negative image. Since the birth of the nation state in the nineteenth century, literature and nation have been closely connected (Anderson 1991). Writing in a national language implied more than ever taking part in the construction of a national literature and culture. Writers considered their national literary language to be an expression of their national identity (being a French writer, an English poet, an Italian playwright, etc.) and they developed a (sometimes strong) loyalty to this national literary language (Grutman 2000). Language mingling was easily associated with a flavour of treachery to the national literature, the people and the nation. From the postcolonial era onwards, literary multilingualism has gained new impetus. Postcolonial writers are commonly appreciated for using pidgins or creoles, ‘which are a mixture, or blend, of imported European languages and local vernacular languages’, as aesthetic, sociological and historical writing techniques (Bandia 1996: 147). Since the 1980s, partly as a result of postcolonial studies, multilingual texts have also become a conventional research object and are appreciated as a source of innovation and creation (Meylaerts 2006a).

Scholarly attention soon went beyond the postcolonial paradigm. It was Rainier Grutman who, in his study of the Quebec nineteenth-century novel (1997), coined the term heterolingualism (*hétérolinguisme*), referring to the use of foreign languages or social, regional and historical language varieties in literary texts. Designed to explain the effects of language mingling in literary texts, the concept offers a functional alternative for Bakhtin’s more normative heteroglossia. Hybrid languages, typical of literatures in multilingual cultures, often create translation effects in the text: disparate vocabulary, unusual syntax, linguistic deterritorialization.

The writing and reading act of multilingual literary texts has been defined as an ongoing translation process between the languages involved. In *Translating Montreal*, Sherry Simon shows how deviant forms of translation like translingual poetics, creative interference and translation without an original (literary writing emanating from a bilingual or multilingual context where writing and translating overlap in a creative act that is not based on any...
original) ‘are some of the techniques that drive writing in both English and French’ in the city of Montreal. ‘These are “warm” forms of translation, which turn translation away from its normative function, disturbing the boundaries of each cultural space’ (Simon 2006: 15). For the sake of the monolingual reader, the foreignisms may be followed by in-text translations in the form of explanations, translations or glosses. Translation being in the text, not in between texts, and the original and its translation being present side by side within the same text, literary multilingualism challenges the traditional definition of translation as the substitution of one language for another and of one literary text for another.

Research on the translation of multilingual literary texts (translation covering here a more traditional sense than the above-mentioned types) has gained ample attention from translation studies (see e.g. Delabastita and Grutman 2005; Goldfajn 2006; Suchet 2009). For a long time it has remained associated with translation problems or even untranslatability (Stratford 2008). Whatever may be the problems of translating multilingual texts (that it is problematic is beyond dispute), this approach fails to do justice to the specificity of the phenomenon (basically anything can be a problem in translation and can be approached as such), and is, moreover, based on the questionable postulate of perfect equivalence between ‘original’ and ‘translation’. Eventually the translatable vs. untranslatable dichotomy revives illusions of fidelity, authenticity and understandability which have been discarded by postmodern philosophies of language. We do not fully understand texts, multilingual or not, translated or not.

Away from these normative lines, research on multilingual literary texts in translation has ‘blown apart the traditional dichotomy of source text versus target text, as well as many other structural notions such as fidelity and equivalence’ (Suchet 2009: 151). It thus has once again the potential to lay bare the blind spots of translation studies’ models. Since multilingual literary texts often embody the larger tensions between codes of different literary value and prestige within a multilingual culture, their translation may highlight multilingual cultures’ internal cleavages, their linguistic and identity conflicts. How multilingual can or has a translation to be in a certain context? What are the modalities and identity functions of literary multilingualism in literary translations (Meylaerts 2006a, 2006b)? Until now, these questions have not got the attention they deserve. They expose in an important way the idealizing monolingualism of traditional translational models and the reductive binary opposition between the categories of monolingual vs. multilingual. Consequently, functional descriptive analyses of multilingualism in translation may improve our understanding of identity construction and of cultural dynamics in past and present multilingual and multicultural contexts.

**Multilingual people**

According to the United Nations 2006 report on international migration, about 200 million people, or some 3 per cent of the world population, live outside the country where they were born. More than 50 per cent of them live in the wealthy democracies of Europe and North America. One effect of these massive migration flows is to change the linguistic landscape of these societies. The linguistic diversity of people, especially in the modern metropolis, is enormous. ‘There are now more than three hundred languages spoken in London alone’ (Blackledge 2005: 65). In Miami (Florida) 75 per cent of the population do not speak English at home, whereas 20 per cent of the inhabitants of California speak poor English. Similarly, in officially bilingual Brussels, 20 per cent of the inhabitants do not use French or Dutch for their private conversations.
At home, at school, at work, on an evening out, in chat rooms on the Internet, in casual talk in the street, etc. an individual often uses a plurality of languages, typical of life in the actual multilingual world. Today’s ‘new’ nomadic citizens are characterized as polyglots travelling in between languages, in a permanent stage of (self-)translation. However, it is important to recast catchy words like ‘nomad’, ‘multilingual’, etc. as analytic, functional descriptive tools for accurate and layered description: who precisely is multilingual, when, where, for what purpose, etc? Indeed, unlike naive impressions of unlimited and growing multilingualism, sociolinguistic studies have long since given evidence of the fact that switching back and forth between languages in multilingual societies ‘doesn’t take place randomly, nor does it depend on individual initiatives, but is socially regulated and follows collective patterns of speech behaviour’ (Grutman 2009b: 13). This is especially the case for institutionalized language use like communication between national authorities and citizens (see below) and literary language use.

Multilingual societies seem indeed to provide the ideal context for multilingual writers and/or self-translators. ‘Within the emerging body of non-territorial post-national literary paradigms, the counterpoint between writer and translator is increasingly found in the same subject’ (Stephanides 2004: 103). A writer’s multilingualism may be the result of his/her personal life story and/or of the specific societal context in which he/she grows up. Some are born in a bilingual family or grow up in a multilingual society, while others spend part of their life in an allophone culture. Multilingual writing and self-translation were common practice since antiquity, through the Middle Ages until early modern Europe. Without ever totally disappearing, they ‘diminished during the consolidation of the nation-states’ (Hokenson and Munson 2007: 1), to resurge in the postcolonial era. Just as with heterolingualism, translation studies has so far neglected multilingual writing and self-translation. Hokenson and Munson distinguish two reasons for this.

First, most obviously, the keepers of the canon rather strenuously insisted on the linguistic purity of its foundational figures, such as Chaucer and Dante, and they routinely ignored the founders’ youthful translations of foreign texts … It is clear that well before the German Romantics extolled the mother tongue in such decisive terms, leaving translation theory with some heavy baggage, Renaissance commentators had already cleared the way for the West’s long embrace of nationalistic monolingualism. For centuries, theories of nation and genius erased the intercultural origins of literary innovation.

(Hokenson and Munson 2007: 1–2)

That is, translation studies followed the national literature’s paradigm and conceptualized multilingual writers and self-translators as monolingual nationals, even for past periods. It also established a reductive, idealized distribution of roles between authorship and translatorship and reserved the creation ideal exclusively for the former. Second:

the conceptual problems are daunting: Since the bilingual text exists in two language systems simultaneously, how do the monolingual categories of author and original apply? Self-translation, the specific ways in which bilinguals rewrite a text in the second language and adapt it to a different sign system laden with its own literary and philosophical traditions, escapes the categories of text theory, for the text is twinned.

(Hokenson and Munson 2007: 3)
Just as translators work in zones of overlap between cultures, i.e. in so-called intercultures (Pym 1998), so self-translators and multilingual writers embody ‘such linguistic and cultural overlap par excellence, in person as in literature’ (Hokenson and Munson 2007: 4). From a methodological viewpoint, analyses of texts resulting from multilingual writing or self-translation, instead of focusing on the dissimilarities between the various versions, should ‘begin at a level more basic than current binary theoretical models of “gaps” between texts, languages and cultures. One must start from a point closer to the common core of the bilingual text, that is, within the textual intersections and overlaps of versions’ (ibid.).

Although multilingual writing and self-translation are, just like heterolingualism, historical realities, the majority of multilingual literary actors, who in principle have the potential to become a multilingual writer or self-translator, stick to the role of being a monolingual writer. Those who do become a multilingual writer or self-translator either limit their activities in time – e.g. the start of their literary career – or to certain genres – often less legitimate genres like children’s literature (Meylaerts 2010a). Why do writers so often leave the opportunity to reach a larger reading public? This may be partly due to a lack of linguistic competence, real (perfect multilingualism is after all a rare phenomenon) or perceived. As for the latter, since the romantic ideal of originality and of the writer as an inspired genius, literary writing received an aura of creativity and uniqueness and is easily associated with a more than perfect command of languages, with stylistic tours de force, etc. Unlike non-literary translators who see themselves as mere craftsmen, multilingual writers and self-translators associate themselves with inspired, ‘independent spirits’ (Sela-Sheffy 2005: 18) whose linguistic competence rarely reaches the required perfection. This is why multilinguals may develop a career as a professional translator (e.g. of technical texts, in parliament) and simultaneously a career as a writer, but without ever becoming a multilingual writer or translating their fictional writings (Meylaerts 2008).

Still, for multilinguals who in principle could be multilingual writers or self-translators, additional sociolinguistic, sociocultural and sociopolitical factors may play a role in their reluctance to do so. The key here is institutionalization. Languages and literatures are also and still heavily institutionalized practices. This is not innocent: multilingual writing and self-translation deserve to be rediscovered from an institutional viewpoint since literature is always more than just literature, it is one of the symbolic values of our societies just like sports or business. Understanding the socially regulated and collective patterns of multilingual writing and self-translation requires insight into the complex ways in which they are articulated through the divergent institutionalization of languages and literatures in multilingual societies (Meylaerts 2009b). In so many past and present multilingual societies the monolingualism of institutions (administration, legal affairs, education, army, political life, media, etc.) and a monolingual ideology contrast with the multilingualism of people on the ground. This is/was the situation in numerous Western nation states; this is also the case in a modern metropolis like New York or London, where there is ‘a clear mismatch between the multilingualism of the people and the monolingualism of the dominant ideology’ (Blackledge 2005: 65). In such a context the institutionalized language is the majority language, the language of the most prestigious literary productions. The minority languages are not or are much less institutionalized and the literary works written in the minority languages have a less prestigious, less legitimate status. In short, this type of widespread institutionalization implies very hierarchical, sometimes even very oppositional relationships between languages, literatures and their actors and precisely these hierarchies co-determine the nature and the patterns of multilingual writing and self-translation – among other things because literary actors interiorize these
hierarchies in various and variable ways and perceive their (inter)cultural positions in interaction with these hierarchies. As a general principle, the stronger the institutional hierarchy, the more important it is for minority groups to learn the majority language. In search of social mobility, of participation in the legitimate culture, of literary prestige, the minority groups thus become multilingual, often through education in the majority language. The majority groups in general do not deem it worthwhile to learn the minority language(s). Knowledge of minority languages offers them only limited symbolic, social or economic capital. Moreover, even if multilingual writing and self-translation are in theory possible for every multilingual cultural actor, in practice many among them develop a career as a monolingual writer.

Because of the very pronounced linguistic and literary hierarchies that result from unequal institutionalization, the different literary languages symbolize antagonistic and sometimes irreconcilable values and positions. The so-called ‘free’ choice for a literary language is rarely perceived as neutral, but on the contrary as being part of an outspoken literary, sociocultural, sociopolitical position-taking that renders multilingual writing and/or self-translation problematic. Writing and/or self-translating in the dominant language certainly offers visibility and literary prestige but, especially in situations where the minority cultures are struggling for their linguistic emancipation, it is easily perceived by the minority groups as a treachery towards the minority language and literature, supporting the prestige and dominance of the majority language and literature. Instead, writing and/or self-translating in the minority language is perceived by the majority groups as an attack against their linguistic and literary supremacy (Meylaerts 2009b). Whenever hierarchies are outspoken, multilingual writers and self-translators risk having a hard life.

Multilingual institutions

The relations between translation and multilingualism are not confined to literature but are also constitutive for the whole domain of information services (e.g. printed and audiovisual media, press agencies, news rooms), of international institutions, of law and politics, of business, of technology, etc. in today’s global world. Within these institutional settings, written and oral communication processes are for the largest part multilingual and the object of multidirectional translation. The concepts of ‘source’ vs. ‘target’, of ‘original’ vs. ‘translation’ appear insufficient, altogether misleading categories because every message is a collage of many messages in multiple languages in an often continuous translation chain.

In their external communication, and unlike the aesthetic and ideological functions of language mingling in literary texts, multilingual institutions usually produce parallel monolingual versions. They thus tend to mask the multidirectionality of the translation process, the multilingual origin of their written and oral communication, the structural language contacts and the language mingling of people within the institution. They confirm and continue in other words the doxa of monolingualism within a multilingual society. Unlike the problematics of literary multilingualism in translation, questions of fidelity, authenticity and translatability are often subordinate to the pragmatic function of efficient communication. Once translated, the target messages lose their translational status and function as an ‘original’: they cease to be (seen as) a translation. Moreover, in the legal and juridical domain all translated versions have the authority of an original: they have to function as authentic, perfectly equivalent versions. Likewise, it is often impossible, and even impertinent to know which (part of a) version is the original. As Gagnon 2006 rightly stresses, we need open definitions of translation for the description and explanation of these and...
other processes of translation in multilingual institutions. These definitions can lead us to an understanding of the basic but often hidden decisions in multilingual institutions concerning translation, language policy, identity and ideology.

According to Pym (2008) international public non-profit organizations, i.e. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) present an interesting case in point to analyse the relations between translation and multilingualism. ‘By their very nature, they embody a collective being, with rich complexes of public ideologies, open debate and evolution’, and are as such ‘influenced by discussions about translation and language policy’ (ibid.). Pym distinguishes three possible communication strategies for these IGOs and NGOs. (i) The institution functions in one or two official languages ‘obliging speakers of other languages to learn and operate in them’ (ibid.). ‘Most scientific and technical organizations’ are monolingual, while institutions like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have ‘just two official languages’ (ibid.). When international institutions fall back on language learning as a communication strategy, they either opt for non-translation (one official language) or keep translation restricted to an internal bilateral operation between the two official languages. They thus confine multilingualism at the level of the individual. (ii) NGOs and IGOs can, however, also be radical multilingual and opt for the opposite strategy of multilateral translation: ‘all languages translated into all other languages’ (ibid.). The example par excellence is the EU’s translation policy which is based on multilingualism both in its internal and external communication. Following the EU maxim of ‘equal rights for all languages’ (ibid.), all European officials and all European citizens have the right to communicate respectively within and with the EU in their ‘own’ language. Therefore, European regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations, opinions, etc. are translated into all 23 official and working languages recognized by the EU. Also, ‘documents may be sent to EU institutions and a reply received in any of these languages’.10 Both on the internal and external communication levels, however, pragmatic considerations interact with the ideal of institutional multilingualism by means of multilateral translation. As for the external communication, the 23 languages being the national languages of the member states, the EU’s translation policy is based on the monopoly of the national language and on the monolingual ideology of the nation state. EU citizens’ language rights are national language rights, not extendable to regional, minority or migrant languages. So, for example, although Catalan, Galician and Basque are co-official languages in the respective Spanish regions Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque country, they do not belong to the official EU languages and EU outgoing communication is only translated into Castilian.11 As for internal communication among EU officials, ‘due to time and budgetary constraints, relatively few working documents are translated into all languages. The European Commission employs English, French and German in general as procedural languages, whereas the European Parliament provides translation into different languages according to the needs of its Members’.12 In short, till further notice, multilingual NGOs or IGOs operating through complete multilateral translation giving all speakers the possibility to remain monolingual in ‘their’ language – whatever this may mean – turn out to be an illusion. (iii) The institution functions in one or two languages used on the inside (within the professional interculture), whereas translation is limited to communication between the inside and the outside, between the professional interculture and the client monocultures. This strategy would be the ‘trend not only of international non-profit organisations … but also of most multinational marketing’ (ibid.). Translation permits the individual client/consumer to remain monolingual, ‘to be served in his/her own language’, saving him/her from the burden of foreign language learning.
As far as today’s clients/consumers are mobile and multilingual though, multinational marketing strategies remain inspired by the romantic ideology of people sharing one (national) language within one (national) territory.

**Multilingual societies**

Translation and multilingualism are also inextricably connected at the level of national, regional or local linguistic territoriality regimes (García González 2004; Cuvelier et al. 2007; Beukes 2007). The notion of a linguistic territoriality regime refers to ‘a set of legal rules that constrain the choice of the languages used for purposes of education and communication’ (van Parijs 2010: 4). The latter covers the language of legal affairs, of political institutions, of the media and of administration. What strategies national, regional or local authorities deploy for communicating with their citizens is a question of key importance for both the authorities and the citizens. All over the world authorities are confronted with multilingual populations, whether these are historical minorities or new immigrants. Since democratic societies are based on the ideal of participating citizenship and since participating citizenship presupposes, among other things, the citizens’ right to communicate with the authorities, a fair linguistic and translational territoriality regime is a vital need for the survival of any democratic society. It is also an essential factor in minorities’ identity and integration because it determines their right to vote, to go to school, to receive official documents from the administration, etc.

Within a continuum of regimes, national authorities have four prototypical options for communicating with their citizens (Meylaerts 2009a, 2010b, 2012): first, complete institutional monolingualism – one language regulates communication between authorities and citizens in education and public settings. Often this is the so-called national language, the status of which is inscribed in the Constitution or is the object of special linguistic laws. Minorities have thus no affirmative right to claim a translation of a document or service in one of the minority languages. In other words, a policy of institutional monolingualism presupposes a policy of non-translation often by means of an explicit legal interdiction to translate into the minority languages. Translation is not an enforceable right in a multilingual society that reserves communication with the authorities to those citizens who are capable of understanding the one institutionalized language. Non-translation obliges minorities to learn the national language and operate in it for communication with the authorities. After one or two generations a linguistic transfer may have completely replaced the former minorities’ mother tongues by the institutionalized language, thus reducing the multilingual character of a certain territory. Recent studies and surveys testify to an increasing support for a non-translation policy and its concomitant learning of the national language as the best way to ensure minorities’ integration (see e.g. Schuck 2009, and Wong and Pontoja 2009 for the USA; Schäffner 2008 for the UK; Lahav 2009 for the EU members of parliament). The EU policy towards immigrants is a good example here. The fifth principle of the 2004 EU’s common basic integration principles of immigrant policy says that ‘access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration’ (quoted in Joppke 2007: 6). The fourth principle, however, claims that ‘basic knowledge of the host society’s language’ is indispensable to integration (quoted in Joppke 2007: 6). That is, for the EU, immigrants’ rights are secured through language learning not through translation. Adversaries of such a non-translation policy claim it is discriminatory, it reinforces social structures of inequality.
and exclusion, leads to ghettoization and immigrants’ loss of identity. While the jury is out on the pros and cons, in reality complete monolingualism and non-translation is a very exceptional regime since it is contradictory to a democracy’s ideal of participatory citizenship and thus problematic for its own survival.

The second strategy, situated at the other end of the continuum, is a linguistic and translational territory regime characterized by complete institutional multilingualism with obligatory multidirectional translation in all languages for all. This overall translation strategy guarantees absolute institutional equality of all languages and speakers and thus complies with the fifth EU integration principle: all people have access to institutions, to public and private goods and services in ‘their own language’. At the same time, it enables minorities to stick to their mother tongue and exempts them from language learning. It is thus in contradiction with the fourth EU integration principle. Obviously, the full implementation of this translational regime for all allophone minorities would lead to a dead end. To begin with, it would be a real financial burden. Even if exact calculations are not available, translation costs would amount to a multiple of the actual annual cost of $150 billion just for multilingual immigration and naturalization services in the USA, or to a multiple of the annual £110 million actually spent for translation and interpreting services in the UK (Schäffner 2008: 169). Additionally, in theory each and every newcomer would have the everlasting right to receive complete language and translation services in his/her language: a real utopian principle. According to its adversaries, this regime would imply high risks of ghettoization, impede integration, social cohesion and national identity (van Parijs 2008; Schuck 2009). Often, minority communities themselves seem convinced of these drawbacks (see Schäffner 2008, for an example).

Thus, both the first and second regime reveal incompatibility with a democracy’s ideal of participatory citizenship and with, respectively, the fourth and fifth EU common integration principle. Authorities therefore often opt for a third, intermediate strategy: a linguistic and translational territory regime characterized by institutional monolingualism combined with occasional and temporary translation into the minority languages. In comparison to the first regime of non-translation, this strategy foresees limited translation rights in well-defined situations in attendance of minorities’ learning of the institutionalized language. That is, specific legal dispositions condition the restricted presence of the minority language(s) in the public sphere or in certain institutions. They give, for example, the right to translate public inscriptions or services, to obtain a translated document or an interpreter in certain well-defined circumstances: in court, in health care, in administration. However, through minimal restrictive implementation, these translation rights do not endanger the monolingual ideology. Translation remains temporary and occasional: a granted exception, in anticipation of immigrants’ linguistic and other assimilation (see, for example, the conclusions of the 2007 British Commission on Integration and Cohesion).

In some specific cases, a fourth regime, which is in fact a combination of the three other ones, is applied: institutional monolingualism at the local level and institutional multilingualism with multidirectional obligatory translation at the superior (e.g. federal) level. This linguistic and translational territory regime seems to be reserved for minority groups who can claim historical territorial rights (e.g. in Belgium). The higher (e.g. federal) level institutions are multilingual with multidirectional translation into all institutionalized languages (e.g. French and Dutch in Belgium). At the level of local institutions, monolingualism and non-translation prevail. Within ‘their’ respective territory (e.g. Flanders and Wallonia) and in communication with the higher-level authorities, the historical territorial minority groups are thus always and everywhere served in their own language.
This regime creates monolingual institutional islands under a multilingual umbrella, preventing multilingualism from applying at all institutional levels. The fundamental difference with the second one is that the immigrants’ languages do not benefit from the multidirectional translation rights. They fall either under the first or the third regime.

What type of linguistic and translational regime gives the best chances for participatory citizenship and for minorities’ integration remains unclear. Whatever the regime, it has virtues and flaws as well as passionate advocates and detractors. So many ad hoc regulations used by local and national authorities worldwide illustrate the hesitations, or even the dilemmas that are faced. All these regulations indeed have to function in a complex web of conflicting factors. The impact of a given translation or non-translation measure can be perceived both as a means of oppression and as an attempt for emancipation, according to the beneficiaries, the context, etc.

**Future challenges**

At the heart of multilingualism we find translation. The recent understanding of cultures, past and present, as multilingual therefore constitutes a true challenge for translation studies.

Research on multilingual literary texts in/and translation points to the need for a reconsideration of disciplinary boundaries that used to be language-bound. The complex practice called ‘literature’ can no longer be fully apprehended (if it ever could) along separate linguistic lines, or within constricting frameworks like ‘space’ or ‘nation’. We need to examine how these disciplinary boundaries routinely obscure diversity within so-called monolingual literatures and cultures. This questioning of linguistic, spatial or national boundaries in relation to which separate literatures are constructed, moreover urges translation studies to rethink the nature of the relationships between literatures. New forms of literary translation emerge within multilingual cultures, from relations of proximity instead of distance, from contact zones instead of isolation. They create ‘expanded definitions’ of literary translation as ‘writing that is inspired by the encounter with other tongues, including the effects of creative interference’ (Simon 2006: 17). Translation, then, is ‘the source of culture “at home”’ (ibid.). Does translation studies offer appropriate concepts and methods to analyse these new literary cartographies? Among other things, translation studies should be prepared to transgress the distinctions on which it has built part of its raison d’être, to make explicit the discipline’s presuppositions, but also the rationale behind the choice of translation corpora, and to (re)assess the translational metalanguage based on inadequate, reductive, binary distinctions. This concerns in the first place the familiar distinctions between ‘source’ and ‘target’ or between ‘import’ and ‘export’. The concept of ‘translation’ itself, complemented with the epithet ‘cultural’, seeks to broaden its signification, until now restricted to an intertextual and interlingual scope.

The same goes for the concepts of literary writer and literary translator. Research on multilingual writers and self-translators makes us aware of the partially artificial distinctions between the two roles and calls for a new implementation of the concepts of authorship and translatorship. Originality and creativity are no longer to be located exclusively at the author’s side but are interwoven with multilingual writing and self-translating and thus also with translating. Translation studies can therefore contribute to a new and flexible conceptualization of agent roles within a continuum of overlapping practices between author, multilingual writer, self-translator, translator. This will uncover the similarities between the field of literary translation and other fields, where the overlap of agent roles (translator, copywriter, transeditor, etc.) has already received due attention.
Research on societies’ linguistic and translational territoriality regimes points to the need for empirical research and theories ‘identifying the most crucial levers of change that contribute to bringing outsiders in’ (Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009: 314). How to ensure linguistic and translational justice in a world in which the territorial and monolingual principles of the nation state are at odds with the mobility and multilingualism of their populations? At this point, there seem to be more questions than answers. The elaboration of a fair language and translation policy is indeed part of ‘cross-portfolio policy making’ (Ozolins 2010: 196), in which a variety of factors such as political and social attitudes to immigrants and minorities, models of citizenship, of public policy responsibility, of social welfare, of equal access to education, administration, public health care, integration, etc., play a role that is yet to be determined. The issues to be investigated are thus inescapably social, political and ethical. Future research therefore needs to be more interdisciplinary, exploring the complex relations between translation and linguistic justice, integration and equal opportunities. It places translation studies in front of its social, ethical and political responsibilities, responsibilities that are shared with political and social sciences, anthropology, sociolinguistics, etc.

Related topics

multilingualism; literary translation; migration; institutionalization; self-translation; integration

Notes

1 We use the term ‘culture’ as ‘the aggregate of options utilized by a group of people, and by the individual members of the group, for the organization of life’; ‘society’ refers to ‘a large group of people living on a certain territory’ (Even-Zohar 1997: 355–56) and is thus more related to institutional and territorial aspects.

2 In theory multilingualism is not confined to texts but encompasses more generally all kinds of messages (oral speeches, films, etc.). Although partially overlapping, multilingualism in audiovisual messages (multiple languages spoken in one film, subtitles, voice-over, etc.) also concerns quite different aspects and will not be considered as such here. See Lambert 2004.

3 Multilingualism is, of course, not confined to the present time or to the West; only its modalities have changed due to recent technological, political and other developments.

4 The term diglossia was first used by Ferguson in his seminal 1959 article with the same title. It refers to a society (not an individual) ‘where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play’ (1959: 325). This definition has since been enlarged to functionally differential language varieties of whatever kind and number (see also Fasold 1984; Fishman 2002).

5 Two remarks are important here. First, unlike heterolingualism referring to texts, literary bilingu- alism or multilingualism applies to people. A writer is a bilingual respectively multilingual writer if his/her total text production comprises at least two or more languages whatever the respective part occupied by each of them. These texts, for their part, can be heterolingual or not. Second, unlike Hokenson and Munson (2007), we consider the distinction between multilingual writing and self-translation as gradual and relative and as such not pertinent for the present discussion. The use of different concepts is more revealing of normative definitions of translation than of anything else. When, for example, an author reveals himself to be very creative in translating his own work, he is often called a multilingual writer instead of a self-translator.

6 The concepts ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ do not refer to numbers but to power relations, resulting from unequal institutionalization. On linguistic power relations, see e.g. Bourdieu 1982.

7 Of course, institutionalization is a continuous process: a certain minority language may be institutionalized in local administration but not on the national level, while another minority group may have the right to offer primary (but not secondary or university) education in ‘its’ language, and another group may publish newspapers or possess radio channels or TV channels in its languages, etc.
On the process of interiorization of social structures, see Bourdieu’s habitus concept (Bourdieu 1972; see also Meylaerts 2008, 2010a).

These languages are: Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish.


However, in November 2006 an agreement was signed ‘to allow citizens to complain to the European Ombudsman in any of the co-official languages in Spain (Catalan/Valencian, Galician and Basque) … According to the agreement, a translation body, which will be set up by the Spanish government, will be responsible for translating complaints submitted in these languages. In turn, it will translate the Ombudsman’s decisions from Spanish/Castilian into the language of the complainant’. Available at: www.ombudsman.europa.eu/release/en/2006-11-30a.htm.


The distinction between the two is often arbitrary. In comparison to the natives, for example, all other inhabitants of the USA or Canada are immigrants. However, descendants of nineteenth-century European immigrants, although originally multilingual, have institutionalized a form of ‘English-only’ policy that actually prevails over the natives’ and new immigrants’ languages (Spanish, Arabic, Chinese … ). In general, and as illustrated by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, historical minority languages are better protected than immigrant languages. We’ll use the term ‘minority’ to refer to both historical minorities and immigrants.

Since there is no linguistic regime without a translational regime, we broaden the concept into a ‘linguistic and translational territoriality regime’.

So, for example, since 1992 article two of the French Constitution stipulates that ‘la langue de la République est le français’. As for the USA, section 767 of the S.2611 Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 declares that ‘English is the national language of the United States’, and that ‘unless otherwise authorized or provided by law, no person has a right, entitlement, or claim to have the Government of the United States or any of its officials or representatives act, communicate, perform or provide services, or provide materials in any language other than English’(frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_bills&docid=f:s2611es.txt.pdf).

The Brussels-Capital Region is officially bilingual (French/Dutch). For German speakers, living in the Eastern Cantons, other regulations apply.

Further reading

Simon, Sherry (2006) *Translating Montreal. Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press. (This monograph takes the multilingual city of Montreal and its contact zones between languages as a starting point to study radical new forms of literary translation both in its metaphorical and literal usage and as such constantly questions the boundaries of translation studies.)

Janssens, Maddy, Lambert, José and Steyaert, Chris (2004) ‘Developing Language Strategies for International Companies: The Contribution of Translation Studies’, *Journal of World Business* 39 (4): 414–30. (Based on translation studies concepts, this article discusses three language strategies (mechanical, cultural, political) which companies develop for their international communication process.)


Bibliography


531
——(ed.) (2006a) Heteroglossism in/and Translation, special issue of Target 18(1).


Multilingualism as a challenge for translation studies
