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Juliane House, *Translation*. 2009. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 122 pp.

Reviewed by Bert Cappelle (Université Lille Nord de France & CNRS UMR 8163 *Savoirs, Textes, Langage*)

Many young doctors in linguistics or literature are filling positions in departments of translation studies but might not necessarily have a clear idea of the kind of research carried out by their new-found colleagues. For them, Juliane House's brief introduction to the field of translation theory provides a welcome survey of the main concepts and issues in this area, even though the book is actually intended for readers with little or no background in language study at all.

In a first chapter, translation is straightforwardly defined as in essence a process, rather than a product, whereby a text in one language is replaced by an equivalent text in another. This process is a complex one, as it inevitably involves a delicate 'double-bind relationship': in rendering the source text in the target language, the translator has to be faithful as much as possible to the message of the original text while choosing words befitting the way a text of the same kind would be written in the target language, meeting specifically requirements of style and register. House, who is Professor Emerita of Applied Linguistics at the University of Hamburg, demonstrates this complexity by means of an extract from an autobiography in English and its German translation, in which for instance a description of teaching as "the greatest pain in the neck in the world" in the original is replaced by the more formal phrase *die größte Geduldprobe, die man sich vorstellen kann* ('the greatest test of patience which one can imagine').

Several perspectives on translation are briefly touched upon in the second chapter. Perspectives focussing on the original text, and on the way the language in which it is written differs from other languages, are informed by contrastive linguistics. However, formal approaches to language, to which House reckons Cognitive Grammar, are ill-equipped to deal with the pragmatic functions of sentences in actual texts. More relevant to translation, according to House, are functional theories, such as Hallidayan systemic-functional grammar. Other perspectives focus on the process of interpretation by which the translator makes the meaning of the original text his or her own before reformulating it. Among such more subjective perspectives, House gives a glimpse of postmodernist views which stress the central role of the target cultural environment to whose norms – literary, social and ideological ones – the translated text is adapted and in which it receives its own purpose. Sometimes, the author warns, this deconstructionist emphasis on the culturally conditioned variability of interpretations and on the effect achieved by the target text denies the existence of any stable meaning of the original text and makes its linguistic structure irrelevant.

The question whether radical departures from the original text in the form of 'updates', summaries, paraphrases and popularisations in the target culture can still be called translations is taken up in the next two chapters. Chapter 3 is devoted to the highly complex and controversial notion of equivalence in translation. House refers to J.C. Catford's distinction between 'formal correspondence' and 'textual equivalence' and the quite similar distinction made by Eugene Nida between 'formal equivalence' and 'dynamic equivalence' (i.e. target language naturalness). She then goes on to present Werner Koller's five equivalence frameworks, many of which are mutually incompatible and force the translator to set up a hierarchy of equivalence demands. For instance, a translator might want to maintain certain wordplays or rhyme, thus achieving 'formal-aesthetic equivalence', at the expense of 'denotative equivalence'. House makes the basic assumption that the source text and its target text should be functionally equivalent whenever possible. This leads her to set up her own framework for analysing the original text and its translation and determining whether and how they are equivalent. Original and translation have to be compared along socio-linguistic dimensions of register (defined as "a segment of language in use" (p. 34)) and genre ("a kind of discourse defined by its communicative function in the linguistic-cultural community at large" (p. 35)).

The workability of House's analytic framework referred to above is not immediately self-evident but, thankfully, it is fleshed out with an extensive example in chapter 4, which is about

translation evaluation. Having authored an entire monograph on translation quality assessment, House is in a position to critically evaluate existing views on what makes a translation a good or bad one. She doesn't spare the response-based behavioural view, which aims at scientifically testing the comprehensibility of the translation by using recipients' reactions to it, pointing out that proponents of this view adopt methods that can only be used to evaluate the quality of a text as such, whether it is based on a prior source text or not. She is equally critical of scholarly approaches whose objective it is to reveal the translator's role in producing, say, a minority-unfriendly or a gender-unbiased text, insofar as such evaluations look one-sidedly at the intended effect of the translation and fail to evaluate the translation in a more systematic way. House also argues that in translation evaluation and translation criticism, considerations of social relevance and judgements of good taste should not be mixed up with linguistic-textual analysis.

In chapter 5, House makes a spirited plea for reinstating translation as a teaching tool in the foreign language classroom. Once-popular translation exercises have been forced into exile by proponents of the still-dominant monolingual teaching approach, on the grounds of inducing mother-tongue interference and hindering 'thinking directly in the foreign language'. Translation, being the technical skill that it is, hardly has a place in curricula built around the four more basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing involving authentic and communicative language use. But the pendulum might be swinging back. House argues that translation exercises need not and should not be sterile sets of artificially constructed sentences to be translated into or from the foreign language solely for the purpose of training and testing the acquisition of lexis and mastery of grammatical rules. She instead sketches some examples of possible activities in which translation is respected as a mode of communication in its own right. When applied properly, translation can promote communicative competence in the foreign language and awareness of linguistic and cultural similarities and differences between languages, as well as foster cross-cultural understanding in increasingly multicultural societies. House also points out that translation makes full sense, pedagogically, as it allows learners to exploit their previously acquired knowledge, namely their native language, to learn something new. Translation also recognises the first language as the learners' primary medium of socialization and development. Rather than robbing learners of their linguistic-cultural identity by banning the use of their mother tongue, using translation – and hence also the first language – is argued to heighten learners' confidence, to provide continuity to their learning process, and ultimately to ensure that the foreign language co-exists bilingually with L1 in their minds.

Chapter 6, finally, considers some current issues in translation studies. First, it discusses the current shift in thinking about translation, from a sort of cross-linguistic substitution towards a process of cultural exchange in which the translator may intervene. House gives some contemporary examples where a translator might take socio-cultural or political responsibility to reveal or remove perceived injustices in the text. Secondly, House briefly deals with attempts to shed light on what goes on in the translator's mind when he or she engages in translation. Think-aloud protocols as a means of probing this process are treated with due scepticism, as the thought processes that subjects are verbalizing might not adequately and exhaustively reflect on their underlying cognitive processes and, perhaps worst of all, might interfere with these very processes. However, House does not mention more sophisticated experimental methods such as eye-tracking or key-logging, which do not require subjects to draw upon linguistic and cognitive resources to report on an activity for which precisely such resources are needed. A third current issue covered in this final chapter is that of corpus-based translation research. This is a burgeoning field of study, which is often associated with the hotly debated existence of 'translation universals', that is, recurrent patterns of difference which arise as a result of the translation process *per se*, and which should therefore be observable in any pair of languages, in any translation direction. Somewhat remarkably, House considers such hypothesized universals – translations tending to be more explicit, or using more simplified, conventional and standardized language – only in relation to similar, non-translated texts written in the same language as the target text. However, besides such 'T-universals', researchers have also been in search of generally observable differences between translated texts and their source texts,

or so-called 'S-universals' (to adopt a pair of terms introduced by Andrew Chesterman). The chapter concludes with some thoughts about the burst of demand for translation fuelled by today's global economy. For instance, products, software and information on the Web have to be translated to make them simultaneously available to multiple local markets. Tailoring products and services so that they meet the specific needs of these diverse markets, a translation process known as 'localization', is paradoxically enough not opposed to globalization but inherently tied up with it. The term 'glocalization', which House mentions, nicely captures this global-local strategy.

Taken together, the six chapters whose contents I have set out above probably make up the most concise and coherent introduction to the basic issues of translation studies as an academic field available today. House's overview of the area is accessible to readers who are unfamiliar with it. I should add, however, that the survey does not make for especially easy reading. Fortunately, House has a good feel for when a technical term requires an explanation or when some concrete examples might breathe some air into the otherwise rather dense prose. She also provides end-of-chapter summaries and sometimes even summaries of more demanding sections within chapters. Moreover, the chapters are linked together organically, as concepts which House introduces in earlier chapters, for instance the 'double-bind relationship' of translations, reverberate in later ones. What I also appreciated is that while she charts the main contours of current translation studies, the author does not shy away from evaluating certain approaches and making her voice heard. For instance, of particular interest in chapter 3 on equivalence in translation is House's discussion, however brief, of the Whorfian hypothesis (language being a straight-jacket for thought), which has recently known a surge of renewed interest in linguistics. Even in weak versions of linguistic relativism, there is a view that some concepts are more readily encodable in one language than in another and that this might sometimes pose a limit to equivalence or even translatability. House takes a clear stance here: "Speakers are not imprisoned by the language they speak" (p. 40). Thanks to language's flexibility and inherent creative potential, its users should in principle always find ways to express any experience. House states that this expressibility principle, which is true for any language, implies that any experience is also translatable from one language to another in a functionally equivalent way. It is by virtue of passages which string together the individual chapters and which express her own view that House's overview of the core concepts and strands in translation is as much a personal essay as a balanced summary of the field.

As in other instalments in the series *Oxford Introductions to Language Study*, the summary overview is complemented by a collection of short extracts from the specialist literature, briefly introduced and followed by some questions meant to make the reader focus on the extent to which the points raised in these readings are consistent with what is written in the survey and across texts. The selected fragments, 21 in all, are taken from texts by such scholars as Mona Baker, Theo Hermans, Eugene Nida and José Ortega y Gasset. Two more sections make the book complete: an annotated bibliography providing further reading for each chapter and a glossary.

One minor issue: I found the book's ultra-stiff binding very annoying. Other than that, House's short introduction to translation is highly recommended reading for the uninitiated reader and could even prove useful for teachers of an introductory course in translation studies looking for a suitable structure for their course, some up-to-date material to fill it, a number of relevant texts for more in-depth study and a few matching questions for discussion.