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Non-literary in the Light of Literary Translation

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this article is to contrast non-literary with literary translation. An example from the opening pages of Kafka's *Amerika* is used to illustrate how literary texts may be translated differently from non-literary ones. They differ essentially through intention (literary texts belong to the world of imagination whereas non-literary ones belong to the world of facts) and through the fact literary texts are about persons while non-literary ones are about objects. Nevertheless, both texts are concerned with the fundamental truths of translation: factual, aesthetic, allegorical truth, logical and linguistic truth.

KEYWORDS
Literary translation, non-literary translation, specialised translation, reality, style

No profession is as divided as that of translation. One area is concerned with knowledge, facts and ideas, information, and reality; the other with human individuals, nature and the occupied planet in the imagination; the first with facts, the second with values; the first with clarity of information, the second with style as a reflection of character.

Translation, like human society, which it reflects, appears to have passed through a historical process of secularisation. And whilst the earliest translated texts were religious and legal, and 150 years ago were mostly literary, that is, were mainly written at the time by philosophers, scientists, men of letters and a few divines, now, according to Eugene Nida, literature occupies not more than 5% of the total of works that are translated; and my guess is that the translation of poetry and, supremely, song texts, occupies 0.5% of the total, a figure whose quantity represents the reverse of both its value and its importance. And yet in spite of the considerable gap in subject matter, method and often variety of language between non-literary and literary translation - but some novels like Jane Austen's or *War and Peace* are written as though they were factual - books are still written about translation that do not distinguish between its two genres, and tend to preserve the hoary pronouncements which refer mainly to the first one, e.g. that translation is impossible or servile or treacherous or ambiguous, being connotative rather than denotative; their authors entirely ignore the vast non-literary majority of translations. In fact translation, striving as it does to reveal the truth, to be in the first place accurate, can only be approximate at best, if it is seeking to reproduce the full meaning of the original. In non-literary texts, since it may only be pursuing the facts, rather than their precise quality as well, it can be fairly accurate. In literary translation, it can only be accurate to a certain degree, since it is looking for the connotative as well as the denotative meaning, which has many aspects, of which it can only capture a limited amount; and it uses two languages as its tools, each of which

are unevenly and variably equipped with words, have different sounds and grammars and different word-orders, and different lexical gaps and deficiencies. Whilst the translator juggles with all these and attempts various compensatory procedures, it is only in non-literary translation that she can achieve anywhere near perfection. Nevertheless the link between poetry - the hardest of all literary genres to translate, since it has so many more linguistic factors to account for (notably sound, rhyme and metre) - and translation, is primal and historical and remains, I believe, unbreakable.

2.
I introduce my distinction between literary and non-literary texts with the opening of Franz Kafka's third novel Amerika:

> Als der sechzehnjahrige Karl Rossmann, der von seinen armen Eltern nach Amerika geschickt worden war, weil ihn ein Dienstmadchen verfuhrt und ein Kind von ihm bekommen hatte, in dem schon langsam gewordenen Schiff in den Hafen von New York einfuhr, erblickte er die schon langst beobachtete Statue der Freiheitsgottin wie in einem plotzlich starker gewordenen Sonnenlicht. Ihr Arm mit dem Schwert ragte wie neuerdings empor, und um ihre Gestalt wehten die freien Lüfte.

As a novel this perhaps translates as follows:

> As the sixteen year old Karl Rossmann, who had been sent to America by his poor parents, because a maid had seduced him and had got a child by him, landed after the boat had slowed down, in New York harbour, he saw the goddess of liberty which he had observed for a long time standing in the sunlight, which had suddenly become stronger. As though just recently, her arm with the sword towered above him, and around her figure blew the fresh breezes.

If the translator thinks the readership is likely to overlook or misinterpret the statue's 'sword', she should, I believe, write a footnote, firstly indicating the sword's symbolical (aggressive) significance, and secondly that in fact the figure carries, not a sword, but a torch, symbolizing a welcome to refugees, with further 'localizing' details: name and dates of sculptor, country and period of pogroms referred to.
If the passage were to be rewritten as a news item, it would probably be shortened (the description of the sunlight and the 'as though' passage would be removed); 'sword', being clearly an author's slip, would simply be replaced by 'torch'. Normally, no notes would be required, since the mistake would be regarded as a slip rather than an error.
The example indicates the basic difference between the two genres of translation, which is one of content, not, as more commonly believed, of form. Further, partly because the increase of non-literary texts vis-à-vis literary texts has been so great and rapid, and this has barely been accounted for in the literature, it illustrates the difference required both in the translation and the annotation of the two types of texts.

The main intentional difference between literature and non-literature is that the first comprises the world of the mind and the imagination; the second, the world of reality, of facts and events. Denotationally, literature is (a) poetry, which covers lyrical, dramatic and epic poetry; (b) fiction, which covers short stories and novels; and (c) drama, which covers (1) tragedy, plays about life and death, (2) comedy, plays about normal life, and (3) farce, plays that exaggerate the broad humour of life. Literature derives from the realm of word dictionaries, the general lower case words; non-literature covers the topics of encyclopaedias, encyclopaedic dictionaries, names, titles, upper case words. Literature is written both to be spoken and `sonorised', i.e.read out to oneself and consciously heard in the ear, in natural speech-rhythms, with a word-order that only deviates in order to foreground (emphasise) or `background' (understate) a segment of a text. Non-rhetorical, non-literary texts are written to be soundlessly skimmed.

One can talk generally about the art of literary translation and the science of non-literary translation, but in fact, translation can never be an exact science, since any two languages are always unequally and differently endowed, though not to the same degree: the translation of non-literary French into non-literary Spanish is usually likely to be more accurate than the translation of non-literary French into non-literary German, simply because the first language pair is more closely interrelated than the second, in spite of the common graecolatin link in both pairs. Translation always has a scientific, an artistic, and a skill- or craft- related aspect, even though it is also finally about 5% a matter of taste.

In literary texts, the words are as important as the content; in non-literary texts, this is only true of key words that represent significant concepts, as well as objects, actions and physical and moral qualities, for all of which true synonyms do not exist. (Say: shrub, stutter, green, decent - unfortunately translation equivalents for the adjectives are often missing, since most of these adjectives, including 'green' - but not 'black' or 'white' -and 'decent') require a degree of partly subjective evaluation. Both in language and in translation, as has been noted, there are no absolutes, no strict dogmas: nothing is perfect, ideal, correct, except in a limited, context-free periphery (where 'black' is *schwarz*).

Between literary and non-literary texts, there is a middle stream of topics, headed by the Essay, the prime example of a genre with a non-literary subject and a literary form, which is perhaps to followed by autobiography, arts criticism, philosophy, religion, history, psychology, sociology, cultural studies - whether the words are as important as the content or how closely they should be translated will depend on how well written and how serious they are. All these medial topics are only discussed in non-literary language - words such as 'descry', 'ponder', meditate' would not normally be found in such texts, unless as quotations from literary texts.

Literary texts are about persons, implicitly dialogues between first and second person singular, with a first person plural commentator or chorus; non-literary texts are about objects, basically in the third person. Literary words are about allegorical therefore moral truth. Non-literary texts are about objects, basically in the third person. They are written to be read soundlessly or skimmed or gisted. The core of literary texts is the original or imaginative metaphor and the neologism; the core of non-literary texts is the standard or explanatory metaphor and the plain word. Literary texts are written to be read aloud in the mind, to be slowly savoured, to be judiciously read repeatedly, and increasingly appreciated; the sound of non-literary texts is often ignored, and they are read quickly.

Literary and non-literary translation are two different professions, though one person may sometimes practise them both. They are complementary to each other and are noble, each seeking in the source text a valuable but different truth, the first allegorical and aesthetic, the second factual and traditionally functional. They sometimes each have different cultural backgrounds, occasionally referred to as 'the two cultures', which are detrimentally opposed to each other.

Here there is a long history of mutual distortion and hostility: the literary is viewed as traditional, old-fashioned, academic, ivory tower, out of touch; the non-literary as philistine, market-led, coal in the bath, uncivilised. The dividing line is the word 'engineer', *ingénieur* as an academic, *mécanicien* or *monteur* or *Mechaniker* in working life. In literary texts, these are the faintly Romantic, poetic, obsolescent 19th century words: lone, descry, brood, ponder, linger, rue, ease, all the personal words, which, when stripped of feeling and tenderness, may become non-literary: single, observe, meditate, contemplate, delay, regret, alleviate, the straight reporting words.

Once the distinction is made and recognised in the English language as indisputable in many extreme instances, although it is rather fuzzy and arguable in many medial instances, one may consider its application to other languages. Whilst no language is as rich in words as English, Romanticism, which swept across all Europe from the late 18th to the late 19th century and privileged the individual as opposed to society, the Middle Ages as opposed to the present, nature as opposed to the city, the feelings as opposed to reason, the heart as opposed to the mind, nationalism as opposed to cosmopolitanism, and the dream, sleep and even death as opposed to the conscious will and life, - tended to favour the use of old and mellifluous words for literary texts, in particular the lyric, and later the libretti of Wagner's operas; non-literary texts remained relatively featureless, leisurely and prosy if one considers the academic texts of the late 19th century, says J.B. Bury on history (in fact 1902):

> And moreover I venture to think that it may be useful and stimulating for those

> who are beginning historical studies to realise vividly and clearly that the
> transformation which those studies are undergoing is itself a great event in the
> history of the world - that we are ourselves in the very middle of it, that we are
> witnessing and may share in the accomplishment of a change which will have a
> vast influence on future cycles of the world. I wish that I had been enabled to
> realise this when I first embarked on the study of history.
> *Bury* (1930: 58)

In such writing, one does not use one adjective, idiom, clause or one sentence, if two will do. And in such loose language, there are no difficulties in translation, until the media start peppering it with buzz words, neologisms and computer-driven graphics.

Fundamentally, translation is concerned with five truths: the factual truth, which ensures that the narrative of the SL text, as reflected in the TL text, corresponds with the facts in the real world; this is the domain of non-literary translation, but in large areas of literary texts, the writing strives to become such a semblance of and approximation to reality, that it appears closer to factual than to allegorical truth; the allegorical truth, that is the fusion of imagination and ethics in the translation of a literary work; the aesthetic truth, which in a literary work is the beauty of its form and of its sound; and in a non-literary work is 'all the ease' (Tytler 1791) and the agreeableness of its composition; the logical truth, which puts the text into a context of a causal sequence with a clear basis in reason, sound and space; and the linguistic truth, where the idioms of one language may supplement the missing equivalents in another.

In a recent issue of *In Other Words*, Mike Shields stated:

> I have tried to show that in general terms, the bulk of translation is non-literary,
> but many laymen see it either as a mechanical (looking up words in dictionaries) or
> as an impossible task.'
> Shields (2000: 3)

How many is 'many'? Since the amount and the significance of translation have grown so immeasurably in recent years, it is to be hoped that ignorance about it has not increased in parallel.

The purpose of this paper has been to contrast non-literary with literary translation. I would define specialized translation, the topic of this journal, as the most technical form of non-literary translation, which has its focuses in terms, i.e. words with single meanings within a text to be translated, even though these terms usually consist of not more than 5% of the text's vocabulary, and may have different meanings in other contexts and texts. Where such terms do not exist in the target language, I recommend that they be clearly identified by a 'translation label', i.e. a provisional translation, usually made with inverted commas, until and unless it becomes generally accepted. In other respects the style of the original text should be respected if it is acceptably clear and neat, and

should be improved if it is deficient.

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