

Desblache, L. (2013). Wittgenstein in Translation. Exploring semiotic signatures.. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 19, 157-158. <https://doi.org/10.26034/cm.jostrans.2013.433>

This article is publish under a *Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International* (CC BY):
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



© Lucile Desblache, 2013

Dinda L.Gorlée (2012). *Wittgenstein in Translation. Exploring semiotic signatures*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. 99,95 € / \$140.00, pp. 361. ISBN: 978-1-61451-144-1

Translation Studies have long been explored in the light of other disciplines. Chronologically, and most visibly, they have been paired with Literary Studies, Linguistics, Cultural Studies and Sociology. Yet curiously, Translation Studies are rarely considered in parallel with Philosophy. Perhaps this is not so strange. As Jonathan Rée reminds us, although Philosophy “may always have clarity as its ideal, it is famous for its incomprehensibility [....]. And in philosophy, alone amongst the theoretical disciplines, obscurity may be precisely the quality that makes a work a classic: it indicates [....] that it is a sensitive and perhaps artfully elaborated documentation of an essentially intractable enigma, an exemplary embodiment of the bafflement in which philosophy takes its rise” (Rée 2001: 226-227). As the principles of translation are based on the provision of meaning which is as clear and accurate as possible, the reasons why philosophy-translation relationships are uneasy are understandable. This affects both the interaction of these two disciplines and the translation of philosophical texts. In addition to this issue of “obscurity”, the fact that Philosophy, unlike Science for instance, does not converge in a lingua franca, and that its production is truly multilingual makes its translation even more delicate to undertake. It is therefore not surprising that philosophers rather than translators have on the whole undertaken philosophical translations.

Dinda Gorlée’s awareness of these issues and of the fact that “[t]o judge a philosophy in translation is to take a risk” (15) is acute. *Wittgenstein in Translation* is in this sense both pioneering and brave. Gorlée’s previous work on Pierce, Jakobson and Wittgenstein has already established her as a leading semiotician and Translation Studies scholar in the neglected area of philosophical translation and semiotic translation criticism. This complex and comprehensive new volume, drawing on and expanding from her previously published work on Wittgenstein, confirms her as a powerful intellectual figure in this field. It also provides a bridge between philosophy and translation about a thinker who did not only write in fragmentary ways, but has been translated by individuals whose opinions on him did not converge, interpreting texts entirely differently, both stylistically and intellectually, reflecting their own knowledge and preferences. *Wittgenstein in Translation* aims to “groun[d] the cross-disciplinary and cultural studies required of the knowledge of the philosophical translators, in order to bring their beliefs and knowledge into a sharpened focus”(6).

Although the book is dense and not easy for readers who are neither semioticians nor philosophers, it is designed to be accessible to academics from wide-ranging disciplines, and specially from Translation Studies. An

introductory chapter entitled "Building a semiotic bridge", in particular, provides leading principles of semiotics and entangles not only the relationships of translation and semiotics but also Wittgenstein's own associations with semiotics. It offers a clear introduction to Pierce's and Jakobson's principles of semiotics that should be read by any Translation Studies scholar and student. The subsequent chapters can also be read independently if wished, and a comprehensive index favours such thematic reading. Chapters are structured around Wittgenstein's sources (St Augustine, Plato, Saussure, Pierce...), his different texts (primarily *The Blue and Brown Books*, *Philosophical Investigations*, *On Certainty*, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and *Culture and Value* as well as some unpublished works), considered in translation but also as relevant to the philosopher's "mutations" and influences. Key notions to both his thought and to translation itself are also used to emphasise translation and philosophy as continuing processes rather than finished products. They include the following: the fragmentary nature of Wittgenstein's texts, mostly reconstructed by editors as full volumes; the concept of "language-game," expressing the idea of language and action woven together and as organisers of language and reality; the multilingual and transcultural aspects of Wittgenstein's work; and perhaps most importantly, the notion of "semiotic signature" left by all the translators who have deciphered Wittgenstein's writings, and which electronic technologies enable us to compare and analyse more accurately than ever. Gorrée defines such a signature as "a relatively free space marked by the internalized voice and style of the translator or translators beyond any 'signatory' held by the author's own intentions and philosophical beliefs of his oeuvre" (4. The author's emphasis). Yet she also encourages us to search beyond, as "[a] translation is not only a body of facts in a semiotic signature; it grows into a cognitive interaction reflecting an intuitive conversation between source and target language and the culture exchanged with (or within) the translator's multilingual mind" (214).

This intellectually outstanding book takes us through a detailed journey of Wittgenstein's mind, of the mind of his translators but beyond Wittgenstein's work, it leads to uncharted grounds in (re)thinking the (re)translation of the ambiguities, contradictions and complexities of philosophical discourse. Every library should order *Wittgenstein in Translation. Exploring semiotic signatures*. It is a new significant reference in Translation Studies.

Reference

Rée, Jonathan (2001) "The Translation of Philosophy." *New Literary History*, Spring, 32(2), 223-257.

Lucile Desblache

University of Roehampton

E-mail: l.desblache@roehampton.ac.uk