

CETRA: Phd - presentation

Towards an analysis of the intercultural discourse and the representation of the Other in 18th century English and French translated prose fiction

1 Context/Introduction

I would like to start my presentation by referring at a very important, let's say fundamental article by Shelly Charles. S.C. is a researcher who started her career at the university of Tel-Aviv and whose articles are very well known both within the field of 18th century studies as well as translation studies¹ In her polysystemic-based analysis of the French literary system in the eighteenth century (1980, 1981) she also indicates that, intercultural relations, and more precisely translations from and into English, played an important part in the expansion of prose fiction both in France and England. It is in this context of literary, and more generally speaking, cultural interferences between French and English literature that my PhD-project, which I started up at the University of Leuven nearly a year ago, is to be situated.

Although several analyses² (Grieder, Graeber) have already been focusing on the topic in general, there is still an important part of this specific literary field that has been left unexplored, especially when it comes to examining translations of prose fiction from French into English.

I will start my presentation by telling you a little more about the specific questions that guideline my personal research within this larger context, trying to indicate where my type of questions are related to previous writings, and where I intend to be innovative. Then, after having given some examples to illustrate my topic, I will try to explain how I am planning on delimitating my corpus, taking into account the several questions such delimitation evokes. Finally, I will focus a little more on some methodological questions I am dealing with.

¹ Le système littéraire en état de crise, *Poetics today*, 1981, 143-160.

² Josephine Grieder, *Anglomania in France* (1985) & *The story of French sentimental prose fiction in late eighteenth century England: the history of a literary vogue*, 1975 ; Wilhelm Graeber, *Der Englische Roman in Frankreich* (1995); Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever, *The literary channel: The international invention of the novel* (2002);

2. Topic

By reading several novels and a certain number of secondary works on translation-theory³ and practice in the eighteenth century in order to get a better idea on the characteristics of “translation” in eighteenth century France and England, we have come to realize that the communicative role played by translations between those two countries, concerned not only the translations (by themselves), as being transpositions from one language into another, but also the – what we would like to define as – intercultural discourse that had been inserted into prose fiction and which these translations [more or less literally] transferred into another culture⁴. First of all, in order to avoid some terminological misconceptions, we insist on specifying what we understand by ‘intercultural discourse’. Based on our own experience with the texts we are dealing with, this type of ‘discourse’ could be defined as the different means by which the relationship between the French and the English and the conceptions they have of one another are represented in fiction. This cross-cultural character of the texts expresses itself in different ways and at different levels, e.g. the presence of English characters in French prose, the use of French vocabulary in English texts, often implying certain connotations, and of course the introduction of explicit sociocultural criticism as well on the own as on the other culture. For the time being, our aim is to focus mainly on this last manifestation of ‘intercultural discourse’, without, of course, totally disconnecting from the other forms of interculturalism.

2.1. Cross-cultural discourse fictionalized...

According to us, it would be therefore interesting to examine, first of all, in what way the fictional “setting” could have had an influence upon the way the characteristics of and the relationships between the French and the English were represented. Indeed, how was the socio-cultural criticism on the other as well as on the own culture inserted in the story? Did

³ See Dhulst and Steiner

⁴ By claiming this, we reject in a certain way the following assertion by Grieder (1975): In considering French sentimental fiction as a genre, one cannot help but be struck by one element: its themes were deliberately universal, utilitarian, and conservative. And it did so not by appealing to any national code of ethics or values but by promoting that justice and virtue which spring instinctively from sensibility. Thus, French sentimental fiction was, by its very premises, supra-national in emphasis. Sentimentality was a common denominator on both sides of the Channel.” (43)

it play an important role in the plot, as in dominating at times the fictional dialogues, or was it transferred in a rather implicit manner or even completely non-existent? How was the English or French-speaking Other “constructed” by his speech, his manners or in the way he was perceived by other characters?⁵ Furthermore, did the fictional character of the texts have an impact upon the content of the criticism, by permitting the author a certain freedom of speech, compared to non-fictional socio-critical discourse of the same period, in texts such as Voltaire’s *Letters concerning the English nation* or Lord Chesterfield’s *Letters to his son*? Could it, by any chance, have made the criticism more heterogeneous, given that the various fictional characters involved could allow the author to confront divergent opinions? And because of that diversity, was there a certain tendency to putting things into perspective, even minimizing the cultural differences? And so on.

2.2. ...in translation?

Beside this set of research questions, concerning the French and English texts in their original, that is ‘non-transposed’ version, we are even more interested in how the intercultural aspect of the source-text was rendered by the translator. Indeed, while, by the first series of questions, our research is to be inserted in a larger *tradition* of theorizing and mapping the fictional conceptualization of the other, its originality lies mainly in this second movement, that hasn’t been explored properly so far. Firstly, we would like to ask ourselves in what way the cross-cultural discourse present in French or English texts, could have influenced or maybe even stimulated the translation of the texts into another language. Grieder (1975) for instance, in her study of English translations, generalizes the question in the following, restraining terms: “That the French sentimental authors admired, and deliberately used the British in their fiction is undoubted; that the English translators capitalized on their admiration when they chose works to present should not be unexpected.” We, on the contrary, have reason to doubt the predominantly “admiring” tone which, according to Grieder, determines the representation of the English in French fiction, let alone its unproblematic transposition into English (example).

⁵ Here we would like to commemorate the concepts of “scénographie” and “ethos” as they are conceived by Maingueneau.

Moreover, an analysis of the way in which translators treated the intercultural discourse in the texts they translated, could also teach us something on how fiction in general was perceived in the eighteenth-century. Did the translators simply copy the passages, respecting the fictional ‘setting’, or did they prefer to reveal the imposture, presenting the criticism for what it was, in other words sociopolitical discourse. And if they choose to do so, in what way did this manifest itself in the target-text?

Although a first, let’s say “macro-structural” glance at some of these translations seems to indicate a certain tendency to “literal, word to word translations”⁶, we already found some cases where the intercultural discourse, often concerning both English and French customs, has been adapted by the translator.

3. Some examples

In this respect, translations – or sometimes rewritings- of texts by both Mme Riccoboni as Crébillon-fils have proven to be relevant case-studies. For instance, instead of rendering word for word the criticism on English culture, as it is introduced in an epistolary monologue that dominates the whole second part of Crébillon’s *Les heureux orphelins*, Edward Kimber, the English translator, prefers to replace the explicit intercultural discourse of the original by a whole different plot which gives rise to a more heterogeneous kind of cultural debate between different characters. In itself Crébillon’s text was already a free adaptation of an English text, *The fortunate foundlings*, written by Eliza Haywood. In other words, the critical discourse present in Crébillon’s version was already a result of so-called “*translational, or rather adaptational behaviour*”, since most of the critique sprung from the imagination of the translator himself. This only confirms the importance of translations – or should we say rewritings? – as regards the “transposition”, or in this case, the non-transposition, of intercultural discourse in the XVIIIth century. All this obviously evokes other questions, related to the translation-topic, as there are: why did the substitution take place? By whom? Were the omissions linked to a certain controversy concerning intercultural debate or were

⁶ In this respect, Josephine Grieder (1975) doesn’t seem to bring us any further, on one hand she is willing to acknowledge the differences between some French and English versions: “That the translators did use their own judgment in dealing with the foreign originals is proved by differences between the French and English versions of some works” (33). On the other hand, she seems to assert that: “Despite the numerous assertions that they had endeavored to make the foreign fiction conform to British mores and taste, however the translators’ emendations and alterations were for the most part minor.”

they purely coincidental? In other words, should we speak of general censorship or did the omissions result from the personal view of the translator?

Whereas Kimber and Crébillon seem to opt for a quite radical, destructive way of dealing with the source text, there is also the example of Percival Stockdale, who, in his version of Riccoboni's *Lettres de Milord Rivers à Sir Charles Cardigan* (1776 vs 1778), seems, at first sight, more respectful towards the source-text, leaving the cultural discourse more or less intact. Evenso, this so-called fidelity to the source text doesn't refrain Stockdale from adding some notes to his translation, feeling it necessary (I quote): "to correct some important Errours of the Lady; - where she was mistaken as a Philosopher; - where she was misled by the Partiality of a Native of France; - and by the Prejudices of a Woman." Though be it in a more respectful way, the English translator nevertheless still adapts the source-text to the target-public. Beside the variety of strategies towards the source text, our first analyses of translations have also demonstrated the importance of adopting a double focus when it comes to mapping the intercultural nature of prose fiction. Not only, translations, by themselves, shed a privileged light on the matter, by the fact that they can learn us a great deal on how those criticisms are considered by the "reader", since every translator is, first of all, a reader. But also, translators sometimes inform us in a more subtle way on how the Other (culture) is considered. For instance, when a character as the libertine Chester, a prototype of the young, France-oriented Englishman, already present in Crébillon's "Les heureux orphelins", speaks a whole different, very base and colloquial tongue in Kimber's version, it tells us something about the way in which that kind of "multicultural" person is perceived by an English translator. Obviously, this kind of information would not have come up by examining the source-text alone.

In short, having, up until now, only examined a few cases, we have already discovered different ways of dealing with the source material. Will there appear to be as many approaches as there are translators or shall we be able to detect certain tendencies in how the critical discourse is being dealt with in prose fiction and its translation? In order to give a sufficient answer to such questions our first goal is to compose a larger corpus of 'representative' texts which could deal – among other questions related to cultural interferences – with French-English interculturalism.

4. The entire corpus

But how does one compose a corpus of such texts, without having the occasion to read the enormous amount of texts and translations related to our topic? For the time being, we are still combining two strategies in order to get to some sort of overview; on the one hand, we started our research by consulting several bibliographical works, like the *Bibliography of French translations of English works 1700-1800* by Rochedieu (1948), *The eighteenth century English novel in French translation: a bibliographical study* by Streeter (1936), or the bibliographical list of English translations added to Josephine Grieder's *The story of French prose fiction in late XVIIIth century England* (1975). In addition to these very specific, but, especially as regards Grieder's list, also non exhaustive overviews⁷, we are consulting at the same time Cioranescu's *Bibliographie de la littérature française du XVIIIe siècle* and of *The new Cambridge bibliography of English literature*⁸. These occasional consultations, though not yet finished, have already confronted us with a number of questions, such as: do we focus on translations made by famous, or at least acknowledged translators/authors, thus being able to outline some profiles of relevant actors of the field? What about anonymous translations that appear to be equally interesting? Suppose we find ourselves confronted to various translations of one source text, as happens to be the case quite often, do we select some of them for further investigation? Should we only examine "real" translations or also take into account pseudo-translations and the "histoires anglaises" as well as the "histoires françaises", which, even if they haven't been translated, still reveal to be important in the context of intercultural relationships? Furthermore, as far as the original texts are concerned, should we focus on a certain sort of texts, such as epistolary novels or memoirs, or should we restrict our corpus to novels which in their title already have a certain intercultural aspect?

⁷ An author as well-known as Crébillon, for one, doesn't even occur in the list of translated French fiction, made by Grieder in 1975. Evenso, Edward Kimber, of whom some works have also been rendered into French, isn't listed in either of the bibliographies we have consulted.

⁸ One of the problems with which we are confronted by consulting these bibliographies is that the listings are alphabetically ordered by original authors instead of the translators.

5. Provisory corpus

Before further determining the course to follow in our project, we decided, in the first months of our research, to combine our bibliographical research with a first analysis of some of the texts concerned and to construct, by that means, a corpus *by practice*. Indeed, instead of restricting our corpus before having examined the field, we chose to be driven by the flow of texts itself, by the extremely complex and fascinating web, constructed by eighteenth century French and English translations. But one has to start somewhere: that is why we have been focusing, so far, on three “translated translators”, namely : French translators of English fiction, whose own works have been, at least partially, translated into English within the eighteenth century: L’abbé Prévost, Mme Riccoboni and Crébillon-fils. Originally, these authors were selected because of their representative role within the eighteenth-century literary field as well as upon their – literary and other – relations with the English culture. Starting from these representative “cases”, whose texts we had already access to, we were planning on creating our own “web”, where each translated translator (or at least up to a certain amount) could evoke other cross-cultural relations. For instance, we discovered that, beside Crébillon, both Eliza Haywood and Edward Kimber played a double role in the intercultural field, having, on one hand, translated works from French authors as Edme Boursault or le Chevalier de Mouhy. On the other hand, some of their works have, in their turn, been translated by French authors. That way, we wanted to explore the field of possible interrelations step by step, working, from the beginning, on the texts themselves and hoping to discover some new links, new kinds of fictionalized interculturalism and maybe even other, related research questions. Why then focus on those ‘actors’ who have played both a passive and an active role in the field of translations? Precisely because, by having translated English texts into French or vice versa and by maintaining intensive contacts with the “actors” on the other side of the channel, we presumed that their own texts were more likely to contain some interesting passages. Beside that, it seemed also relevant to examine the way in which the relations with other literatures could have stimulated, in a more general way, the creative writing-process itself. This process already shows itself in some translations, which, in more than one case, appear to be rather original texts, inspired by some parts of the original, instead of real translations.

6. Our delimitation parameters reoriented....

However, during our stay here in Misano, we have come to realize that, although the idea of the “translated translator” remains an interesting concept, it might as well not reveal itself to be such a valuable parameter when it comes to examining the intercultural discourse. Indeed, in a way we could say that the term permits us to “think” the hybrid nature – both French and English – of the two literary systems involved. In other words, it allows us to “transcend” the binary systemic division between source and target-system, towards a more “intercultural” perception of English and French society in the 18th century, a notion borrowed from Anthony Pym in his *Method in translation history* of 1998⁹. Nevertheless, by including only those texts into our corpus which have been produced or translated by “traducteurs traduits”, we might tend to exclude on beforehand other interesting specimen, simply because they don’t measure with the prerequisites of this particular group. On the other hand, the fact of belonging to the happy few doesn’t necessarily imply that all texts related would be relevant.

That it is why we have decided to search for other parameters in order to limit our corpus not only in time, but also as far as the genre is concerned. Indeed, we may intend to restrict our corpus to those novels which, already in the title, promise a certain “nation-bound” point of view, as is the case of some of Riccoboni’s and Prévost’s novels and which have been translated afterwards. By proceeding thus, we should be able to compose a corpus that is both representative and limited. Of course, other problems will come up while reorienting the construction of our corpus, if not only for the availability of some texts, but at least it will be easier to overlook it and to justify its composition. Indeed, since our aim is to look for fictionalized discourse on the French-English cultural relations and distinctions *and* since we are not in the possibility of reading all the texts, it would seem obvious to us to concentrate upon these texts which, already in the bibliographical reference, carries a sort of “intercultural promise”. Against the backdrop of this larger corpus, we will then proceed to a number of case-studies.

⁹ Meylaerts (2004: 53) : “Pour lui, la traduction est faite dans des communautés interculturelles par des traducteurs qui appartiennent à une “interculture”. »

7. Methodological framework

Thus, a lot of questions remain unsolved, especially as far as our corpus is concerned. Moreover, although I feel I have been constructing here a steadier methodological background, we are still in search for a more ‘adapted’ theory of translation. Nevertheless, the various tutorials and lectures have been, especially at that level, in a way both enriching and reassuring. First of all, we have been given the advice, as will be the case for many among you as well, to explore our corpus from a more sociological research-angle. Indeed, we think that, given the fact that we are dealing with cross-cultural discourse in translation, which is *in se* strongly related to the social-cultural context of the text-production and reception, a more sociological approach might reveal to be very enlightening. Moreover, Professor Delabastita has strongly recommended us to make an appeal to the findings of “imagologie” and narratological concepts in order to gain a better insight in the configuration of (national) characters. But, since we still like to consider our project as being a part of the larger field of Translation studies, we continue to aim for a theoretical (maybe partially polysystemic-inspired) framework containing more typical “translation-bound” concepts [if ever these exist]. In that respect, we could say that, rather than restraining ourselves from the beginning to a strict methodology, which could blind us from other interesting point of views, we prefer to simply keep our eyes and mind open to what we are confronted with at different text-levels, in order to elaborate our own methodology and categorizations, more closely related to the nature of the texts. Or to quote the terms of Theo Hermans in his *Translation in systems : Descriptive theories explained*, which summarizes what I have been saying : “The lesson to be learned from the models [...] is undoubtedly that schemes and procedures can help and offer hints and pointers, but they remain ancillary. In the end it will be the questions to which the researcher seeks the answers, on whatever grounds, which focus the attention.” (71)