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Translating Theory

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Introduction

Most readers never question whether or not translation is actually possible. And it is perhaps the most prolific of readers who take most for granted that translation is as basic and straight-forward a linguistic activity as conversing in one's native language. They take for granted that a text gets converted from one language to another in a systematic and learned manner by an informed expert. Surely there are better and worse translations, but the quality of the target language text is assumed to be the result of the activity of a translator who understands what s/he is doing. The translator may misconstrue or misinterpret a phrase or collocation or even a sentence or two; but basically readers presume that the translator is faithfully and accurately converting a source language text into a target language text. These texts mean the same thing as each other. That's the whole point.

As many scholars have noted, translation plays an active role in fostering the growth and appreciation of literatures, languages, and cultures among nations. This fact has been noted by literary specialists, social critics, philosophers, and the like; but the scope and importance of translation becomes apparent to any lay person who considers the issue. As so many have observed, our most basic cultural institutions—universes of knowledge!—have been and continue to be impacted by the mass of translations that travels throughout the world. It is the renowned writer, film-maker, and Japanophile Donald Richie who articulates the import of literary translation as persuasively as one can: "Whole areas of thought would remain unknown, whole lives would lie undiscovered. The literary translator not only delivers us full fragments of culture but brings a close analysis of language to bear on cross-cultural literary questions in a way central to knowledge itself" (Richie 3).

Interestingly, it is some of the twentieth century's most accomplished literati—including various literary scholars and writers—who have come down so harshly on translation.

And here, the term should be understood as *literary translation*, as the more general category *translation*, is not their area of interest. In fact, it is the very literariness or the poetry in language that the critics deem the most untranslatable of linguistic elements, the elements that infuse texts with what is artistic and worthwhile. Robert Frost, famously remarked that “poetry is what gets lost in translation” (qtd. in Weinberger 6).

That said, the *poetry* in translation is but one of its aspects. Even then, it is possible to translate. For some, including a great many poets such as Eliot and Pound, it is poetry which provides the imperative for the activity: “Poetry is that which is worth translating, and translation is what keeps literature alive” (Weinberger 7). Moreover, if we look at the process *translating*, not the product *translation*, then one can argue that the subject can be engaged theoretically. It is possible because as an aspect of human language, translating can be treated and enhanced by extant theories of language (linguistic theory).

Roger Bell, for one, proposes that a theory of translating is dependent on a theory of mind. This paper supports Bell’s position but goes on to incorporate a particular mentalistic theory of language in pursuit of a theory of translating—*Generative linguistics*, which supplies a powerful yet highly constrained theory of language and provides a compelling account for the acquisition and structure of language. Generative linguistics therefore equips us with a solid theoretical framework within which translating and translating theory can be advanced reasonably and rationally. This new translating theory calls for and motivates a rational, overriding imperative to translate literary works as absolutely accurately and literally as possible. (This approach contrasts sharply with the prevailing position today.)

Translating Theory

The phrasing of title of this paper is meant to explicitly draw attention to what Mikhail Bakhtin might have characterized as the polyphonic nature of language, that it is ambiguous at the core.¹ As Elzbieta Tabakowska puts it, “behind... single utterances are found duets, sometimes whole choirs of voices, singing in unison or discord” (72). That

1 The title may be construed in one of two ways: one which denotes something like “The Theory of Translating”, another which denotes something like “Deciphering *Theory*” or “Making Sense of *Theory*” or “Figuring out *Theory*.” “The Theory of Translating” is interested in the configuration of theories that are specific to translating, and “Deciphering *Theory*” is interested in theory (de)construction, particularly theories of language and literature.

linguistic units—words, for instance—do not have singular, *monologic* meanings challenges those who work with translation to define what it is in a text that gets translated if not determinant messages. The impossibility of locating absolute, invariable meanings in SL (source language) texts which can be perfectly converted into equivalent linguistic units in TL (target language) texts is a prevalent argument against translation. It has also been argued that translation is not possible precisely because irreducible, culturally specific meanings are inextricably tied to linguistic units—what Roman Jakobson refers to as “the dogma of untranslatability” (146).

Translation Studies began in the early 1980s as an independent field of scholarship, largely in response to the linguistic approach to translation, which has been purported to be fixated on scientifically discovering meanings and precisely transporting messages. In contrast to traditional approaches (both linguistic and literary), Translation Studies has come to view translation “as one of the processes of literary manipulation, whereby texts are rewritten across linguistic boundaries and that rewriting takes place in a very clearly inscribed cultural and historical context” (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* xvii). In other words, Translation Studies is more interested in the manifestations, uses, abuses, and social, cultural and historical contexts of translation than the scientific derivation of meanings.

Critics claim that the scientific approach to translation theory has come to an end; others have argued that it has never been possible to construct a theory of translation, scientific or otherwise. Translation is an art form, and therefore it is futile to postulate any set of criteria, laws, hypotheses—theories—for what it is or should be. Art cannot be reduced to logical, scientific or mathematical formulae: “To know more of language and translation,” writes George Steiner, “we must pass from the “deep structures of transformational grammar to the deeper structures of the poet” (108). As Steiner would have it, only poets can translate poetry. It is not unreasonable to consider, however, that the art/poetry in translation is but one of its aspects. Even then, it is possible to translate, despite the claims so many poets. If we look at the process *translating*, not the product *translation*, then one can readily argue that the subject can be engaged theoretically (House and Blum-Kulka, Bell, et al.).² It is possible because as an aspect of human language, translat-

2 Here “theory” is being referred to in the narrower sense of the term, as it is used rather loosely by many literary scholars for discourse strategies better described as “approaches” or “attitudes.” (More on this topic below).

ing can be treated and enhanced by extant theories of language (linguistic theory).

In addition to the process of translating, linguistics should in fact be mindful of all the basic language processes—listening, speaking, reading and writing—because they all operate in concert with the same innate language faculty. Based on such observations, the individual processes have found themselves as privileged items of scholarly interest at various times and places. For example, that which is our immediate concern—translating—has been privileged in recent times by several notable scholars as the most primary of these operations:

As language itself is a translation, the act of recreating language through the reading process constitutes another form of translation. The German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer succinctly summarizes the essence of the act of reading in relation to the translation process. ‘Reading is already translation, and translation is translation for the second time.... The process of translating comprises in its essence the whole secret of human understanding of the world and of social communication.’ The notion of reading as yet another act of translation develops into a major undercurrent of translation theories in the twentieth century, culminating in the so-called reception theory, and in the statement that all acts of communication are acts of translation. (Schulte and Biguenet 9)

Gadamer’s formulation of the relationship between translation, reading and communication makes for a clever metaphor and useful hermeneutic-heuristic device; i.e., all acts of communication are acts of translation: We are not “communicating,” rather we are “decoding,” “deciphering,” “recoding,” “transcoding,” “translating.” Most of all, however, Gadamer’s conception indicates the fundamental relationship between the language processes: Regardless of which one is privileged as the most primary operation, a sound linguistic theory should address them all.

Roger Bell writes, “If we accept that we have a responsibility to attempt to describe and explain the process [of translating] and that the process itself is, essentially, mental rather than physical, we are committed to undertaking the investigation within the discipline of psychology...” (13). Bell is proposing here that a theory of translating is dependent on a theory of mind. This paper concurs with Bell but goes on to incorporate a particular mentalistic theory of language in pursuit of a theory of translating, *Generative linguistics*, which supplies a powerful yet highly constrained theory of language and

provides a compelling account for the acquisition and structure of language.³ Generative linguistics therefore equips us with a solid theoretical framework within which translating and translating theory can be studied.

Obviously, this is not to say that any theory of translating which somehow incorporates generative linguistics will be a good theory. In fact, one of the most influential translation theorists of the twentieth century, Eugene Nida, once borrowed generously from generative linguistics; his approach has come to be regarded by most scholars in the field of Translation Studies as precisely the wrong approach for the subject.⁴

Not only is generative linguistics incompatible with translation, argue the critics; it also has not satisfied the defining criteria of a scientific revolution in the Kuhnian sense. This point is relevant because several prominent Translation Studies scholars promote the image of linguistics as an old-fashioned, empiricist, dogmatic discipline that has not yet recognized the fundamental changes during the last several decades in the way that other academics, especially those in the fields of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, have come to view language and literature. The critics suggest that linguistics has not moved beyond structuralism of the empiricist variety to meet the new theoretical paradigm, disposed towards interpretation and ethical and aesthetic relativism:

Most writers on translation who come to the subject from linguistics ... are still caught up in the more positivistic aspects of linguistics.... And yet, though many linguists

3 “Generative linguistics” is the term I use here for what is variously referred to as “generative grammar,” “Chomskyan linguistics,” “transformational grammar,” etc. Presently the branch of the theory headed by Chomsky is in a “minimalist” phase: “Much of the work in syntax in the 1980s involved the postulation of ever more complex structures and principles: as a reaction to the excessive complexity of this kind of work, Chomsky in the 1990s has made minimalism (i.e., the requirement to minimize the theoretical and descriptive apparatus used to describe language) the cornerstone of linguistic theory. The *minimalist program for linguistic theory* which he has been developing ... is motivated to a large extent by the desire to minimize the acquisition burden placed on the child, and thereby maximize the learnability of natural language grammars” (Radford 6).

4 Though Nida’s own attempt at deriving universal translation units ultimately failed, there is significant evidence for such abstract, systemic and universal properties in humans. Anthropologist Donald E. Brown, for example, “has noted that behind anthropologists’ accounts of the strange behavior of foreign peoples there are clear but abstract universals of human experience, such a rank, politeness, and humor. Indeed, anthropologists could not understand or live within other human groups unless they shared a rich set of common assumptions with them, what Dan Sperber calls metaculture Inspired by Chomsky’s Universal Grammar (UG), Brown has tried to characterize the Universal People (UP) Far from finding arbitrary variation, Brown was able to characterize the Universal People in glorious detail ...” (Pinker 412).

writing on translation have no doubt familiarized themselves with the work of Sir Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn and other theorists of science, positivism still leads a shadowy existence as the ‘invisible theory’ behind much of what those same linguists write on *our topic*. (Bassnett and Lefevere 3; my emphasis)⁵

Bassnett and Lefevere suggest that positivism has fallen by the wayside and a new post-modern paradigm has or should have emerged; they claim that most linguists are indifferent to this shift in the paradigm.

Kuhn’s analysis of theory construction provides for the view that there are no universal standards of right and wrong, good and bad, that “the world is to be interpreted through a plurality of conceptual systems, none of which possesses greater cognitive validity than any other...” (Elliott 169). Theories cannot be derived by subjecting them to “empirical acid tests” on the basis of “atomistic facts.” This is a point well made, but in 1959, three years before Kuhn’s influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was published, Chomsky wrote a now famous review of B. F. Skinner’s *Verbal Behavior*, exposing the fundamental deficiencies in his linguistic model. Chomsky took Skinner to task because, though Skinner was not a linguist, his brand of empiricist behaviorism was both fundamentally flawed yet enormously influential on linguistic theory at that time. Chomsky noted that *Verbal Behavior* was “the first large-scale attempt to incorporate the major aspects of linguistics behavior within a behaviorist framework...” (Rev. of *Verbal Behavior* 26).⁶

Since then, writes Frederick Newmeyer, Chomsky’s review has come to be regarded as “the most important refutation of behaviorism” (*The Politics of Linguistics* 73), and by association it therefore stands as the most important refutation of structural linguistics. In the manner of Kuhn, Chomsky argued that “no scientific theory had ever resulted from the scientist performing mechanical operations on the data” (*The Politics of Linguistics* 66). The structuralist approach is fundamentally flawed because, contrary to what structuralists argued, a language’s grammar cannot be ascertained by performing some set of

5 What’s this *our topic*? We must take issue with this presumption of ownership by any one school of scholarship related to language and literature. To wit, in its defense: “Positivism has had a highly positive impact on late twentieth-century thought, and it does not deserve its fate of having degenerated to such an extent that the term is now largely used negatively to denounce any view which is too narrow, too empiricist, or which predates Postmodernism” (Belsey).

6 Leonard Bloomfield’s book *Language* (1933) was written from a behaviorist standpoint. As the first attempt to make general linguistics a science in the modern sense, it also had a huge influence on the evolution of (American) structural linguistics.

discovery procedures on it.⁷ The classical structuralist approach was to fastidiously delineate the most basic operations of a language (at the phonological level), then when that level has been exhaustively studied move to a “higher” level (morphological level), and so on, up the linguistic hierarchy. But there is a crucial problem with this approach; that is, such a bottom up approach denies access the higher levels—syntax, semantics, and pragmatics—since the phonological level can never be absolutely ascertained. In short, classical structuralists could not study syntax. Thus, the many profound insights into language and the mind that have been gained as a result of Chomskyan syntactic explorations were beyond the reach of classical structuralist methodology.

In 1957, the same year that Skinner’s *Verbal Behavior* came out, Chomsky’s landmark *Syntactic Structures* was published. As a consequence of the critical reception of this book, his views have essentially transformed the way linguistics had been done since the ancient Greeks. As Adams and Searle put it, “Noam Chomsky’s contributions to the development of modern linguistic theory have been massive and revolutionary. Indeed, one could argue that linguistic speculation prior to Chomsky was, in a sense, pretheoretical, in as much as there was no significant consensus as to what a ‘theory’ of ‘linguistics’ ought to explain—or even whether a ‘theory’ ought to have an explanatory function” (37). Why then do critics maintain that his theory has not constituted a scientific revolution? The argument goes something like this: It is not the most popular school of linguistics; therefore, it does not satisfy Kuhn’s uniformity of belief criterion. But, as Newmeyer recognizes, of all the aspects of Kuhn’s theory, “none is as vulnerable as the ‘uniformity of belief’ hypothesis. It is apparently the case that no scientific theory, even the most uncontroversially revolutionary one, has ever generated universal assent” (*Generative Linguistics* 28-9).

Before the publication of *Syntactic Structures*, it was widely believed that it was not possible to construct a non-empiricist scientific theory of language. Yet this is precisely what Chomsky did. In other words, he totally inverted the paradigm, while keeping it under the purview of science. Yes, “there was a Chomskyan revolution,” writes Newmeyer, “because anyone who hopes to win general acceptance for a new theory of language

7 Here “grammar” is not to be construed with its sense of a schoolbook grammar but with its Chomskyan sense of an observationally, descriptively, explanatorily and predictively adequate theory of language which minimally accounts for a native speaker’s ability to generate and to make well-formedness judgments about an infinite number of sentences in her/his languages. Generativists study a grammar as an internalized linguistic rule system, “the principles which govern the formation and interpretation of words, phrases and sentences” (Radford 2).

is obligated to show how the theory is better than Chomsky's. Indeed, the perceived need to outdo Chomsky has led him to be the most attacked linguist in history" (*Generative Linguistics* 30).

The strength of Chomsky's position lies not simply in the fact that he discredited structuralism (of the empiricist-positivist variety), but that his theory is original and convincing in its own right and has positively impacted a wide range of disciplines. In fact, "Chomsky is currently among the most-cited writers in all of the humanities (beating out Hegel and Cicero and trailing only Marx, Lenin, Shakespeare, the Bible, Aristotle, Plato, and Freud) and the only living member of the top ten" (Pinker 23).

Revolutionary or not, empiricist or not, critics challenge linguistic approaches to explain many aspects of literature and translation that no non-linguistic theory can.⁸ But linguists in general and generativists in particular rarely claim that the linguistic/scientific approach is applicable to literary and translation studies.⁹ The analysis of literary texts is an area of scholarship that linguists simply do not pursue as a rule: "Generativists study the form of language, not its content. The material conditions that determine what one might choose to speak [or write] at a particular time and place are simply beyond the scope of generativist theory" (Newmeyer, *The Politics of Linguistics* 133). In Saussurean terms, we would say that generative theory addresses the *langue* of translation, not the *parole* ("competence" and "performance" respectively in Chomskyan terms).¹⁰ Linguistic approaches to translation, therefore, may deal with the "mechanical" aspects of how translating gets done, not the cultural, aesthetic, ideological, epistemological, utilitarian—extra-linguistic—reasons for why it gets done (which many believe are the most interesting aspects of translation).

8 For obvious reasons linguistics will have more in common with translation than with literary scholarship: nouns, verbs, articles, clitics, pronominal anaphora, declensions, tenses, etc. occupy a central place in linguistics and translation discourses, not in literary discourses.

9 For example, to the misappropriation of generativist deep-structure concepts such as those employed by Nida, Chomsky responds: "... the existence of deep-seated formal universals ... implies that all languages are cut to the same pattern, but does not imply that there is any point by point correspondence between particular languages. It does not, for example, imply that there must be some reasonable procedure for translating between languages" (*Aspects* 30).

10 "In work dating back to the 1960s, Chomsky has drawn a distinction between *competence* (the fluent native speaker's tacit knowledge of his language) and *performance* (what people actually say or understand by what someone else says on a given occasion). Competence is 'the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language,' while performance is the 'actual use of language in concrete situations'" (Radford 2).

Translating Genre

The tendency to categorize texts into exactly two types crosses over translation schools and theoretical perspectives. Most voices simply posit the text types “literary” and “non-literary” (or “technical”) when engaging translation. The other inequitable binary categories of yesteryear recognized by many contemporary literary scholars—high culture/popular culture, imaginative/common, original/copy, masculine/feminine, center/periphery, etc.—barely enter discussions of translation when the topic concerns the literariness and non-literariness of texts.¹¹ We are most likely to read that non-literary texts require literal translations and literary texts require free, interpretive translations. So even in this post- or post-post-modern milieu, the discourse on what kind of translating approach to use is largely predicated on the binary notion of the categories “literary” and “non-literary.” The literary enters the privileged realm of artistic expression, the non-literary, the uncultured realm of science.

Poetry, for example, is invariably inscribed as literary and thus requires free translation: “The translation of poetry is the field where most emphasis is normally put on the creation of a new independent poem, and where literal translation is usually condemned” (Newmark 70). Newmark is certainly not alone in underscoring these notions of poetry, notions leading to the conclusion that literal translations of literary texts are impossible. Cicero is often cited as an original voice expressing this sentiment concerning the tension between literal and free translation: “If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator” (*De optimo genere oratorum*; qtd. in Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 43). Ultimately, Cicero departs from the function of the translator and concludes that, above all, the translator is responsible for the “judicious interpretation of the SL text so as to produce a TL version based on the principle *non verbum de verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu* (of expressing not word for word, but sense for sense)” (op. cit.).

As a rule, linguists today privilege the study of modern spoken languages over literature, as literary scholars privilege the study of literature over analysis of modern spoken languages. The distinction that linguists draw between spoken and written language is as

11 The deconstruction of these paradigms, however, is a privileged approach employed by a number of Translation Studies scholars when exploring texts as cultural artifacts.

arbitrary as the distinction that many literary theorists make. (The distinction is that linguists examine written transcriptions of spoken language, by and large, not short stories, poems, plays, novels, and speeches.) If generative linguistics values the creative capacity of the mind as manifested through ordinary language, then why not value the creative capacity of the mind as manifested through literary language? Asserting that literature is axiomatically different from spoken language because it is stylistically affected in some way unlike ordinary speech suggests that spoken language lacks the capacity to employ the same or similar affectations. But, in my view, ordinary people are not so obtuse that they cannot affect tone, register, rhetorical nuances, diction, pronunciation, etc. in their spoken language as authors do to texts. To say that written language more creatively or explicitly affects these features is to presume a second class linguistic and therefore intellectual status for the spoken language of ordinary people: the crude, artless babble that flows naturally from the mouths of layfolk.

Russian Formalists saw *ostranenie* (“making strange”) as constituting the literariness of a work; literature was defined by its use of explicitly contrived, artistic language. Terence Hawkes writes, following Viktor Shklovsky, that

The essential function of poetic art is to counter-act the process of habituation encouraged by routine everyday modes of perception.... The aim of poetry is to reverse that process, to defamiliarize that with which we are overly familiar, to ‘creatively deform’ the usual, the normal, and so to inculcate a new, childlike, non-jaded vision in us.... ‘Making strange’ ranks as a central preoccupation of formalism and a good deal of the most valuable formalist analyses of literature consequently consist of an account of the various means whereby and conditions in which *ostranenie* takes place. It follows that these also constitute an account of the structural means whereby and the conditions in which ‘literariness’ may be recognized and distinguished from other modes and manners of linguistic communication. For by comparison with ‘ordinary’ language, literary language not only ‘makes’ strange, it is strange. (62-3)

However, since almost every linguistic utterance constitutes an original combination of words, constrained by a maximally restrictive grammar in the generativist model, it is not meaningful to say that literary language is quantitatively or qualitatively more “creatively deformed” than spoken language.

Bruce Rosenberg observes that there is a need for terminology that more accurately

describes literature that is oral. Since “oral” means “that which is spoken” and “literari” means “of reading or writing” (OED), the term “oral literature” is an oxymoron. Rosenberg therefore coins the term “oralature” to capture the orality of the medium while recognizing its value as equivalent to that of written mediums. In fact, as Walter Ong indicates, oralature may even surpass literature in an important way: “The inscribed word cannot resonate as does the spoken. Sound manifests the speaker at a maximum; hearing puts us in contact with the personal grounds of actuality ... in a specially intense way” (qtd. in Rosenberg 14). Whether or not oralature can put us “in contact with the personal grounds of actuality” more than written language is a debatable issue (Jacques Derrida, in particular, debates this issue); that the notion of oralature complicates the distinction between written and spoken language is not. And in regards to translating, Roda Roberts writes that “the many features shared by translation and interpretation have led some scholars to consider them as two modes of one basic operation” (178).¹²

Cultures have different literary traditions, which among a number of other complexities, presents the challenge of translating across genres and rhetorical styles. As a consequence, some researchers have argued that there exist formal differences in reading strategies and rhetorical styles for different cultures/languages. It has been argued, for instance, that Japanese has a “circular” rhetorical style and English a “straight line” style; also Japanese has been analyzed as “using a reader-responsible rhetoric, English as using a writer-responsible rhetoric, and Chinese as being in transition from a reader- to a writer-responsible rhetoric” (Hinds; qtd. in Leki 132). So, the question of how to translate rhetorical styles for TL readers whose reading strategies are conditioned by cultural and linguistic factors different from SL readers is not trivial. Two immediate questions follow from these observations: 1) is it an unequivocal fact that different cultures/languages have different rhetorical styles, rather than individual authors who have different rhetorical styles? And 2) if there are in fact differences among cultures in their rhetorical styles, is it possible to transform them into target language rhetorical styles when the meaning is tied to the styles?

Terry Eagleton argues that literature is a category generated as part of a vast and mutable dynamic, that it is not constituted by some static literary feature. Naturally then, following this reasoning, it should be extremely difficult if not impossible to develop an

12 Roberts recognizes too that although translation and interpretation share a number of fundamental properties, most theorists maintain a distinction between them.

orderly, precise theory for such an elusive subject as literature: “... there is in fact no ‘literary theory’, in the sense of a body of theory which springs from, or is applicable to, literature alone” (*Literary Theory* vii). It does not surprise us then that the construction of a theory of translation will be as complex, enigmatic, difficult as the construction of a theory of literature.

The literary/non-literary bifurcation represents a simplification of a more nuanced continuum of text types and rhetorical styles, each requiring a unique sort of translating technique. Or not. It is fairly well accepted today that there is great variety in text types and rhetorical styles along the continuum but also that many perceived literary differences are rooted in ideological and epistemological differences. So, which translation technique then do we employ when translating interlingually across genres? There is a strong argument to be made for translating as closely as possible (literal translation), otherwise we might not be “translating” at all; instead we would be transforming, adapting, interpreting, rewriting—not “carrying over messages”—and should refer to the process accordingly: “Translating must aim primarily at ‘reproducing the message.’ To do anything else is essentially false to one’s task as a translator” (Nida and Taber 12).¹³

And, forwarding the argument that messages can be reproduced in translation, Roman Jakobson posits that “all cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language. Whenever there is deficiency, terminology may be qualified and amplified by loanwords or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions” (147). He concludes: “Languages differ essentially in what they must convey and not in what they may convey” (149). In other words, though messages cannot always be easily ascertained, the possibility does exist to locate them, and (literal) translation is possible.

13 Nida and Taber underscore precisely the issue with which Translation Studies scholars, who view the task of the translator in considerably more liberal terms, most differ; for example, Barbara Godard argues: “*Womanhandling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator. Taking her place would be an active participant in the creation of meaning who advances a conditional analysis. Hers is a continuing provisionality, aware of process, giving self-reflexive attention to practices. The feminist translator immodestly flaunts her signature in italics, in footnotes-even in a preface” (qtd. in Bassnett and Lefevere 94). It seems to me, in Godard’s view, translators may manipulate texts at will, constrained only by their own ideologies, creative instincts, aesthetics, poetics, mood, etc. But if ideologies, instincts, etc. are the only constraints, then translation degenerates into little more than a horn for the translator to blow.

Translating the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

Preceding the deconstructionist promotion of semantic anarchy, the strongest positions countenancing the argument that equivalences can be drawn between one cultural/linguistic system and another are based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The hypothesis is a theoretical tenet that combines two principles: 1) linguistic determinism, which states that language determines the way we think, and 2) linguistic relativity, which states that the distinctions encoded in one language are not found in any other (Crystal 15). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis contains the proposition that there are culturally specific meanings associated with particular linguistic structures, meanings which cannot be reduced to universal linguistic common denominators, meanings which remain inescapably untranslatable. And so, Sapir argued that there is no such thing as an objective, unchanging world:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.... No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (162)

William Labov's famous sociolinguistic study of systematic language change, based on research done at New York department stores, can be used to make the argument that speech forms which differ in their structural properties are bound to social-cultural differences. Labov found that working-class New Yorkers are more likely to drop word final "r" from their speech than wealthy New Yorkers.¹⁴ We might want to conclude then that a particular linguistic form (r-lessness, in this case) is bound to a particular socio-cultural characteristic (lack of wealth). On the other hand, it can be argued that "any

14 Labov also argued that working class New Yorkers were more likely to assimilate linguistic forms of wealthy New Yorkers based on this study. This type of "top down" assimilation is obviously not universal: The appropriation and assimilation of urban Black culture by suburban Whites stands in contrast, for example.

grammatical property can be found in the speech of members of any social class and at any known stage in human history. Grammatical structure is thus, in the Marxist sense, an ahistorical phenomenon” (Newmeyer. *The Politics of Linguistics* 134). We see, for example, that the life of “r” is reversed in the south of England where wealthy people are more likely to drop word final “r” than the working-class (Trudgill). And we find another obvious example of the arbitrary link between speech forms and social/cultural characteristics in the use of negative concord (“double negatives”) by speakers of Spanish and BEV (Black English Vernacular, Ebonics); that is, speakers of these languages are obviously not compelled on linguistic grounds to maintain similar world views, modes of behavior, etc.. Furthermore, we should note the enormously varied world views and social, cultural, and economic differences among people who speak the same language.

When the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is pushed to its logical conclusion, the rationale for promoting sexism (men and women speak differently) and racism is justified. It could be argued, for instance, that speakers of BEV, who are *at the mercy of a particular language that determines the way they think*, have lower IQs, or some similar absurdity, because they do not speak Standard Educated English. And it could be argued that women are inherently more acquiescent, kinder, gentler, mysterious, or whatever than men; that is why in many cultures women inflect verbs differently than men. As they are *at the mercy of the particular language that determines the way they think*, women, cannot help but speak more politely, more deferentially; they are simply demonstrating through their language a secondary, subordinate nature—an absurd conclusion to arrive at. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis provides argumentation for conducting racial, sexual and economic discrimination but not translation

Translating the Backdrop

Newmeyer posits three general approaches to language analysis: the humanistic, sociological, and autonomous approaches, which in turn are based on the three traditional areas of scholarship: the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. Since translation and linguistics are so intimately connected, a responsible translation theory should therefore engage a linguistic theory, with an awareness of its history and *raison d'être*: “... investigations into the nature of language, its origin and function, should constitute an integral part of translational thinking...” (Schulte and Biguenet 7). I do not think it is necessary to label every translator for the kind of linguistics s/he practices, but

in these frenzied times of relativistic, post-structural, post-modern theories it is very useful to know what their basic frame of reference is.

Unfortunately, there is little interaction between scholars of the three approaches to language analysis. So, when Bell notes that “translation theorists ... demonstrate a far from adequate grasp of the principles of linguistics and its methods of investigation” (22), we can add to his observation that many linguists also demonstrate *a far from complete grasp of the principles of linguistics*.¹⁵ What I mean by this is that neither linguists nor anyone else can possibly have a comprehensive familiarity with the entire field; it is simply too vast.¹⁶ So rather than trying to account for all linguistic theories and approaches to language study, translation scholars should focus on an area of linguistics which complements their own interests. Or they can pretend that translation exists in a bubble impervious to linguistic realities.

Translating the Science of Language

The scholar who approaches language as a natural scientist focuses on its properties “that exist apart from either the beliefs and values of the individual speakers of a language or the nature of the society in which the language is spoken ... ‘autonomous linguistics,’ as we might call it...” (Newmeyer. *The Politics of Linguistics* 5–6). Practically speaking, autonomous linguistics is a locution used to refer to either “structural linguistics” or “generative linguistics.” The beginning of autonomous linguistics can, for most purposes, be traced to 1916 with the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de Linguistique Générale*.¹⁷ Saussure develops his approach to linguistics around the premise that “lan-

15 “While some notable figures in linguistics, such as the American Edward Sapir and the Russian Roman Jakobson, have combined the different approaches to language in their work, the pervasive tendency in the field has been to insist that language can be studied in one way only. In fact, the term ‘linguistics’ has continually been redefined to exclude whichever approaches happen to be out of favor” (Newmeyer. *The Politics of Linguistics* 10).

16 The number of schools and traditions is immense: anthropological linguistics, applied linguistics, biological linguistics, clinical linguistics, comparative linguistics, computational linguistics, dialectology, educational linguistics, ethnolinguistics, functional linguistics, graphology, historical linguistics, language acquisition, lexicography, machine translation, mathematical linguistics, morphology, neurolinguistics, philology, philosophical linguistics, phonetics, phonology, pragmatic, psycholinguistics, semantics, semiotics, sociolinguistics, statistical linguistics, syntax

17 “The work of Ferdinand de Saussure ... forms the groundbase on which most contemporary structuralist thinking now rests” (Hawkes 19). Chomsky, for his part, has shown little direct interest in Saussurean linguistics, though he would of course recognize it as the cornerstone of structuralism.

guage [*langue*] is characterized as a system based entirely on the opposition of its concrete units” (Saussure 107).

Chomsky does not deny that there is a part of language—an autonomous system—that can be abstracted from the totality of speech; in contrast, he has argued forcefully in favor of this view for the past fifty years. Therefore, since generative linguistics and structuralism share this defining attribute, it is convenient at times to refer to them as a single school. So, when critics with humanistic backgrounds attack structuralism, by implication the criticism is also intended for generative linguistics, though ironically not vice-versa; that is, when they attack generative linguistics, structuralism is not automatically implicated. I think this situation exists because many more humanities scholars such as literary theorists have engaged structuralism and Saussure than generative linguistics at university.

As the preeminent figure in generative linguistics, Chomsky is one of the first to argue that language has structure. What largely separates his linguistics from other orientations is that he adds to the premise of linguistic structure an innate, genetically determined language faculty, a language organ:

The human brain is unique in many respects, and the mental structures that grow under the boundary conditions set by experience ... provide humans with a ‘unique instrument.’ But it is difficult to imagine that this ‘uniqueness’ resides in the total absence of structure, despite the antiquity of such a belief and its remarkable grip on the modern imagination. What little we know about the human brain and about human cognitive structures suggests a very different assumption: a highly constrained genetic program determines the basic structural properties of our ‘mental organs,’ thus making it possible for us to attain rich and intricate systems of knowledge and belief in a uniform manner on the basis of quite limited evidence. (“Equality: Language Development, Human Intelligence, and Social Organization” 197)

As a consequence of its observational, descriptive, explanatory and predictive power, generative linguistics has significantly impacted many areas of scholarship (as noted above) but does not interest contemporary literary and translation scholars, who ironically are infatuated with language issues; they purport interest in linguistics but do not scrutinize the most consequential school, generative linguistics. Structural linguistics, on the other hand, has had a significant impact on the thinking of literary and translation scholars.

For example, Nida, a major figure in structural linguistics, wrote prolifically and influentially on the subject of translation, and structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has had a major impact on both anthropology and other disciplines, which in turn have impacted translation scholarship: “By the 1960s, Lévi-Strauss’s work had triggered a major intellectual movement in France, represented by such figures as Roland Barthes in literature, Michael Foucault in history, Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis, and Louis Althusser in Marxism” (Newmeyer, *The Politics of Linguistics* 36). And in critical theory Derrida, the preeminent figure in literary studies of the last half century, attained prominence in his field by privileging the deconstruction of structuralism and Saussure.

Being considered a science was instrumental in validating structuralism as an important subject of study and granting it a good measure of prestige in academic, economic, political and religious circles. In fact, its prestige was further compounded merely through its association with these institutions, providing yet another explanation for its use by some literary theorists wanting to boost the legitimacy of their own “unscientific” field.¹⁸ Then the myth grew bigger than the theory. The significant status and influence

18 Cf. Newmeyer. *The Politics of Linguistics*, chap. 5 for analysis of the ideological contributions to the selection and construction of, especially, structuralist theory. In particular, he notes that “probably [the] most important reason for the success of structural linguistics in the United States is that the American government, early on, found it in its interest, directly or indirectly, to sponsor structuralist research. The special relationship between the government and the profession, which began on the eve of the Second World War, was so vital for the field that it has even been suggested that ‘American structuralism’ was shaped in the post-war period by field work experience directed, not toward anthropology, but toward the international involvements of the United States” (51).

There has been a great deal of political discourse, debate, and consequential legislation for reading methodologies for children, which exemplifies an obvious instance of the ideological influences on theory construction and selection. *Phonics* is a method based on structuralist assumptions about language learning and is championed most enthusiastically by the political right. George Bush Jr. offered it repeatedly during his first presidential campaign, its instruction being mandated in many states while he held office. (The pedagogical and economic consequences have been staggering.) The *Whole-language* approach, broadly based on generative assumptions, is generally a cause of the left; it has not fared so well during the political milieu of the 90s and 00s.

Robert W. Sweet Jr., director of the National Institute of Education under President Reagan and federal Administrator for Juvenile Justice Programs under President Bush Sr., spelled out in simple English the most expedient method of teaching children to read, the “gateway skill ... essential for participation in the knowledge-based economy of the next century.... It’s as easy as a, b, c. The best approach for the overwhelming majority of children is systematic phonics, the simple concept of teaching the 26 letters of the alphabet, the 44 sounds they make, and the 70 most common ways to spell those sounds” (38-9). Or as whole-language supporters would say: “Phonics, the stringing of vowel and consonants together to spell out meaning, one word at a time, requires the kind of drill and practice that its late 20th-century critics say is stifling and boring” (*The Times Educational Supplement*, June 21, 1996: 16).

which structuralism has derived from being considered “science” has proven to overshadow many of its fundamental flaws. And as many, usually humanistic, critics collapse the schools of linguistics into one convenient target, generative linguistics is inappropriately marked for the faults of classical structuralism. But, in addition to putting forth one of the most innovative theories of linguistics during the last 2,000 years, Chomsky has put forth the most damning criticism of structuralism in the last forty. Regarding its leading figure in the field of psychology, Chomsky writes:

Skinner offers a particular version of the theory of human malleability.... Skinner has been condemned as a trailblazer of totalitarian thinking and lauded for his advocacy of a tightly managed social environment ... and since Skinner invokes the authority of science, some critics condemn science itself, or ‘the scientific view of man’ for supporting such conclusions.... Given the prestige of science and the tendencies toward centralized authoritarian control that can easily be detected in modern industrial society, it is important to investigate seriously the claim that the science of behavior and a related technology provide the rationale and the means for control of behavior.” (“Psychology and Ideology” 158-9)

Ironically, Chomsky may have fueled the criticism of his own approach by claiming that his brand of linguistics is even more scientific than classical structuralism. The scientific component is the aspect of the theory that the critics find so offensive. Science is the problem.

One of the founders of the whole-language approach, Frank Smith, views phonics as “commercial America’s means for turning teachers into spirit-crushing personnel and intellectual independence. It’s no wonder that many teachers who love children, who love reading, who feel underpaid and unappreciated, and who are intellectually ghettoized are attracted to whole-languge” (Lemann 130). And Ken Goodman observes, “Whole language classrooms liberate pupils to try new things, to invent spellings, to experiment with a new genre, to guess at meanings in their reading, or to read and write imperfectly. In whole language classrooms risk-taking is not simply tolerated, it is celebrated” (qtd. in Sweet 40).

Phonics teaches learners how to pronounce printed English, while ignoring the creative, interpretive, critical aspects of the reading process. Phonics may teach a necessary skill, but it addresses only one dimension of the reading process: how to sound out words. Reading, however, is a much more complex, interpretive, critical process.

Translating Glass Houses

The term “humanities” traditionally has been used to cover a number of academic disciplines that form a natural class of subjects. But few words in curriculum vocabulary present more problems, and in some circles are calculated to raise more hackles, than humanities. Is humanities simply a generic term for a group of subjects which are not mathematics, science or technology, which include history and to which may be added religious education, aspects of English, art and design and the social sciences? That there is no consensus on what exactly it should mean and how it can or should be used, as if it were a scientifically verifiable object with easily delineated applications, is one of the primary defining qualities of the humanities.

Glaucon suggests to Socrates in Plato’s *Republic* that the organization of an ideal state populated by workers with utilitarian skills would be incompatible with the humanistic needs of *Homo sapiens*: “That is just the sort of provender you would supply, Socrates, if you were founding a community of pigs” (chap. 7, II. 372). People require an environment conducive to creative expression. Humanistic linguists for their part have traditionally focused on poetics and stylistics, by looking at the figurative, aesthetic, and creative use of language in literature.

Not only do the humanities separate people from pigs, but it also has been purported that they foster the maturation of the moral powers of the individual. But, of course, the vast number of highly educated and cultured villains the world over who have both promoted and enjoyed the rewards of the humanities belies this argument. In other words, there is no automatic link to be made between the study of the humanities and moral maturation. But humanities apologists go on arguing that studying the humanities contributes to auspicious moral attributes such as democratic thinking: “Well taught and well learned, the humanities are the strongest democratizing force that formal education can muster.... It is not surprising that totalitarian societies that recognize—and fear—the power of the liberated intellect pay such meticulous attention to the curriculum and pedagogy of humanities teaching in their schools” (Finn and Ravitch 241).

Compounding many academics promotion of the humanities as a moral guiding light is their frequent support of elitist ideals. That is, the humanities have historically shown interest in highbrow culture: the theater, literature, art, and classical anything, not the movies, paperbacks, folk crafts, or popular anything. But as Newmeyer writes, “... it would be a mistake to regard the humanistic opposition to autonomous linguistics as being

tied necessarily to elitist sentiments. Quite the contrary, in fact: that opposition typically sees its view of language as embodying the essence of human freedom and the autonomous view as a threat to it. In particular, humanist critics object to what they see as the depersonalization of language implicit in the structuralist's inventories of grammatical elements and in the generativist's systems of rules" (*The Politics of Linguistics* 102-3). So, though many scholars in the humanities are complicit in promoting elitist ideals through certain cultural and economic practices, they belie their participation with polemical, post-structuralist discourses and outward allegiance to causes that embody "the essence of human freedom."

Chomsky anticipates humanistic misgivings about the scientific approach to language analysis:

The many modern critics who sense an inconsistency in the belief that free creation takes place within—presupposes, in face—a system of constraints and governing principles are quite mistaken.... Without this tension between necessity and freedom, rule and choice, there can be no creativity, no communication, no meaningful acts at all. ("Language and Freedom" 153)

In other words, we are free to creatively interpret texts, albeit within the context of powerful linguistic constraints. In so doing, we are not compromising our resolve to resist chauvinistic empiricist explanations for cultural phenomena when we consider language to have structure and constraints imposed on it by an abstract grammar. In fact, this is a wonderful state of affairs: "Human talents vary considerably, within a fixed framework that is characteristic of the species and that permits ample scope for creative work, including the creative work of appreciating the achievements of others. This should be a matter for delight rather than a condition to be abhorred" (Chomsky. "Equality: Language Development, Human Intelligence, and Social Organization" 199).

Personally, I am very delighted. The generativist conception of the mind provides for all people, every one of us, to possess the capacity to create, to creatively interpret and to acquire knowledge. Some people might be a little slower in expressing their creativity or acquiring knowledge, but we all have the biologically determined capacity and compulsion to generate original thoughts. We therefore require a cultural-political-educational environment that will allow and encourage us to enjoy the freedom of expression and discovery. We are genetically programmed to be free thinkers! Awareness of "the essential human

need for freedom from the external constraints of repressive authority” (Chomsky. “Language and Freedom” 145) is empowering and cause for optimism, because no matter how oppressive the powers that be are, they cannot suppress this human biological requirement.

Theory Translating

Theory is serious business. In fact, it is likely that the category theory grew in prominence in the humanities because of its status in the sciences. Theory suggests rigorous, probing, objective, rational analysis, not irresponsible, egomaniacal, carefree, whimsical flapdoodle, though ironically, many specialists in literary theory are some of the best spin masters in the business.

A number of years ago, I mentioned to some professors of literature that I was having a problem understanding literary theory; they told me not to worry, that I would get it as soon as I learned the jargon. Well, on this very subject of jargon, George Orwell writes:

Mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose.... As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think in turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of words chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more of phrases tacked together like sections of a prefabricated hen-house.... By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself. (“Politics and the English Language.” 130-4)

The word “theory” has come to be in many ways like one of the “stale metaphors, similes and idioms” that Orwell describes. Even though the meaning of the term is vague, we feign that it is not. We have got so much invested in the concept that the term cannot be abandoned, no matter how superfluous it might be. No, we promote it further by giving more attention to theory than to the stuff about which it theorizes. In fact, we have cultivated our sensibilities for the esoteric to the point of exhausting interest in plain (literary) theory, so that the study of anything less than “critical theory” is considered sophomoric, old fashioned and naive.

Still we need theory; we have to engage it. Simply put, we cannot escape it; that is

to say, we are using it even when we don't know it: "Theory is often a pugnacious critique of common-sense notions, and further, an attempt to show that what we take for granted as 'common sense' is in fact a historical construction, a particular theory that has come to seem so natural to us that we don't even see it as a theory" (Culler 4). All things being equal, we might as well make reasoned theory choices and engage it actively, not least of all to better appreciate being exploited by the powers that be.

Language is such a basic ingredient of being human that most of the time we simply take it for granted: "... we don't learn to have a native language, any more than we learn to have arms or legs; the ability to acquire a native language is part of our genetic endowment—just like the ability to learn to walk" (Radford 9). Language is just there, like so many other human attributes. And since it is so basic, it has been subject to the kind of common sense reasoning to which Culler alludes, therefore demanding theoretical analysis all the more. When we fail to compare the merits of (linguistic) theories, we risk subjecting ourselves to the exploits of reasoning based on common sense and pseudo-science.

The theory of language that generative linguists promote looks at the underlying structures and universal properties of language and thus the fundamental structure of the mind. One of the most important questions for generativists, as formulated by Chomsky, queries what it is that we know when we know a language. But for structuralists "mental terms like 'know' and 'think' were branded as unscientific, 'mind' and 'innate' were dirty words" (Pinker 22). For structuralists, social environment was the dominant factor that determined language structure. Chomsky, on the other hand, "attacks what is still one of the foundations of twentieth-century intellectual life—the 'Standard Social Science Model,' according to which the human psyche is molded by the surrounding culture" (Pinker 213). But social environment is just one aspect of communication, and Chomsky demonstrates that through the study of the formal properties of language we can access the nature of the mind and how it relates to communication.

Generative theory postulates a mental device that can generate an infinite number of well-formed sentences by means of a finite (highly constrained) set of grammatical rules. It provides evidence that translators and more pedestrian readers actually have minds and are sophisticated enough to make judgments about the languages they speak, read and translate. Generative theory does not deny that context contributes to meaning, that linguistic units are charged with meaning because of their opposition to other elements, or that readings and interpretations are shaped by social forces, historical circumstances and

environmental factors. What generative linguistics does is that it allows an infinite number of well-formed (“grammatical”) sentences in a language, not an infinite number of interpretations of those sentences or opportunities for them to display *differance*—Derrida’s notion in which the differential nature of meanings in language ceaselessly defers or postpones any determinate meaning; language is an endless chain or “play of differance.” Differance is not a principle which indicates origination, a center, but rather the opposite, where “the original or transcendental signified ... is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (*Writing and Difference* 280).

But, there cannot be an infinite number of interpretations for words, phrases and sentences that may be carried over in translation; translating cannot occur within a dynamic of infinite signification.

Many Translation Studies scholars incorporate deconstructionist ideas in their “theories” of language, to some extent, I believe, because many of the esoteric and avant-garde qualities of Derrida’s writings can be construed as complementing their own often polemical views of culture, history and literature, which traditionally have been framed in more chauvinistic, “logocentric” discourses. Derrida is also frequently cited as the post-structuralist, post-modernist scholar who exposed the fundamental flaws of structuralism. Surely classical structuralism is flawed at its core, but Derrida also makes a crucial slip: Structuralism is one-dimensional, so to speak; thus, Derrida develops an approach to language which is infinitely dimensional; his conception of language allows for it to mean anything any time. As a result, translation is not possible, since there is nothing locatable in an SL text that could be construed to correspond in any reliable manner to anything in a TL text. Derrida’s conception of language does not allow translation to occur, at least in theory.

In sharp contrast, this paper argues that generative theory provides the cornerstone from which a theory of translating can and should be constructed. This is possible because in addition to providing an elegant theory of human language, generative theory also provides empirical evidence for a free, creative, generative mind, which can comprehend, read and translate languages:

“Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation.... There

is no contradiction in this, any more than there is a contradiction in the insistence of aesthetic theory that individual works of genius are constrained by principle and rule. The normal, creative use of language, which to the Cartesian rationalist is the best index of the existence of another mind..." (Chomsky. "Language and Freedom" 152-3).

Chomsky's theory of language does allow translation to occur. Thus, we can move beyond the post structuralist cynicism about the ineffability of language and recognize that we can not only translate literary texts literally but that we should.

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《SUMMARY》

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Generative Linguistics can and should be engaged by those with an interest in Translation Studies while developing their own positions on literary theory in general, but translation theory in particular. Generative theory provides empirical evidence for a free, creative mind that can comprehend, read, speak and translate a language. What is being proposed here contrasts radically with the dominant position of this generation's Translation Studies specialists, who freely incorporate Post-structuralist and Deconstructionist ideas in their "theories" of language. Generative linguistics allows for an infinite number of well-formed ("grammatical") sentences in a language, not an infinite number of interpretations of those sentences or opportunities for them to display *differance*—the Deconstructionist's notion in which the differential nature of meanings in language ceaselessly defers or postpones any determinate meaning; language is an endless chain or "play of *differance*." Within this framework, it is impossible to locate invariable meanings in SL (source language) texts which can be perfectly converted into equivalent linguistic units in TL (target language) texts, rendering the possibility to "translate" manifestly impossible. This is the assumption that pervades scholarship in the field today. The position taken in this paper, predicated largely on generative insights, departs radically from this position (the inherent untranslatability of literature) by explicitly incorporating a very specific, rational theory of language. And if this theory of language is seriously engaged, then translators and translation theorists may practice their activities with the certainty that language actually has meaning and that one language may be translated into another. In application, literary translators are provided with the justification for translating as literally as possible, not as freely or playfully as possible.