

# Translation Studies

Fourth Edition

**Susan Bassnett**



New Accents

# Translation Studies

At a time when millions travel around the planet – some by choice, some driven by economic or political exile – translation of the written and spoken word is of ever increasing importance. This guide presents readers with an accessible and engaging introduction to the valuable position translation holds within literature and society.

Leading translation theorist Susan Bassnett traces the history of translation, examining the ways translation is currently utilized as a burgeoning interdisciplinary activity and extending her analysis into developing areas such as developing technologies and new media forms.

*Translation Studies*, fourth edition displays the importance of translation across disciplines, and is essential reading for students and scholars of translation, literary studies, globalization studies and ancient and modern languages.

**Susan Bassnett** is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Warwick. She has published extensively on translation, and her best known books include *Reflections on Translation* (2011), *Constructing Cultures* written with André Lefevere (1996) and *Post-Colonial Translation* co-edited with Harish Trivedi (1999). She translates from several languages and lectures on aspects of translation all over the world.

## IN THE SAME SERIES

- Alternative Shakespeares* ed. John Drakakis  
*Alternative Shakespeares: Volume 2* ed. Terence Hawkes  
*Critical Practice* Catherine Belsey  
*Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* Christopher Norris  
*Dialogue and Difference: English for the Nineties* ed. Peter Brooker  
and Peter Humm  
*The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial  
Literature* Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin  
*Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* Rosemary Jackson  
*Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* Michael Holquist  
*Formalism and Marxism* Tony Bennett  
*Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* ed. Gayle Green  
and Coppélia Kahn  
*Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*  
Patricia Waugh  
*Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan  
*Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* Walter J. Ong  
*The Politics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon  
*Post-Colonial Shakespeares* ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin  
*Reading Television* John Fiske and John Hartley  
*The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* Keir Elam  
*Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* Toril Moi  
*Structuralism and Semiotics* Terence Hawkes  
*Studying British Cultures: An Introduction* ed. Susan Bassnett  
*Subculture: The Meaning of Style* Dick Hebdige  
*Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction*  
Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires

Susan  
**Bassnett**

Translation Studies

Fourth edition

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1980 by Methuen & Co. Ltd  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN  
and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Second edition first published 1991

Third edition published 2002

This edition published 2014

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 1980, 1991, 2002, 2014 Susan Bassnett

The right of Susan Bassnett to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Bassnett, Susan.

Translation studies / Susan Bassnett.—4th edition.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Translating and interpreting. I. Title.

PN241.B265 2013

418'.02—dc23

2013017303

ISBN: 978-0-415-50670-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-50673-1 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-48823-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Joanna by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

For my father, who made it all possible.

*This page intentionally left blank*

## CONTENTS

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xi
Preface to the fourth edition	1
Introduction	14
1 Central issues	24
<i>Language and culture</i>	24
<i>Types of translation</i>	25
<i>Decoding and recoding</i>	26
<i>Problems of equivalence</i>	33
<i>Loss and gain</i>	39
<i>Untranslatability</i>	40
<i>Visibility</i>	46
<i>Science or 'secondary activity'?</i>	47
2 History of translation theory	50
<i>Problems of 'period study'</i>	51
<i>The Romans</i>	53
<i>Bible translation</i>	56
<i>Education and the vernacular</i>	60



	<i>Early theorists</i>	63
	<i>The Renaissance</i>	65
	<i>The seventeenth century</i>	67
	<i>The eighteenth century</i>	70
	<i>Romanticism</i>	72
	<i>Post-Romanticism</i>	75
	<i>The Victorians</i>	76
	<i>Archaizing</i>	80
	<i>The twentieth century to the 1970s</i>	81
	<i>The coming of age of Translation Studies</i>	83
3	Specific problems of literary translation	88
	<i>Structures</i>	88
	<i>Poetry and translation</i>	92
	<i>Translating prose</i>	119
	<i>Translating dramatic texts</i>	128
	Translation in the twenty-first century	141
	APPENDIX: THE ORIGINAL TEXT OF <i>THE SEAFARER</i>	149
	NOTES	153
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	165
	INDEX	185

## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

No doubt a third General Editor's Preface to *New Accents* seems hard to justify. What is there left to say? Twenty-five years ago, the series began with a very clear purpose. Its major concern was the newly perplexed world of academic literary studies, where hectic monsters called 'Theory', 'Linguistics' and 'Politics' ranged. In particular, it aimed itself at those undergraduates or beginning postgraduate students who were either learning to come to terms with the new developments or were being sternly warned against them.

*New Accents* deliberately took sides. Thus the first Preface spoke darkly, in 1977, of 'a time of rapid and radical social change', of the 'erosion of the assumptions and presuppositions' central to the study of literature. 'Modes and categories inherited from the past' it announced, 'no longer seem to fit the reality experienced by a new generation'. The aim of each volume would be to 'encourage rather than resist the process of change' by combining nuts-and-bolts exposition of new ideas with clear and detailed explanation of related conceptual developments. If mystification (or downright demonisation) was the enemy, lucidity (with a nod to the compromises inevitably at stake there) became a friend. If a 'distinctive discourse of the future' beckoned, we wanted at least to be able to understand it.

With the apocalypse duly noted, the second Preface proceeded

piously to fret over the nature of whatever rough beast might stagger portentously from the rubble. 'How can we recognise or deal with the new?', it complained, reporting nevertheless the dismaying advance of 'a host of barely respectable activities for which we have no reassuring names' and promising a programme of wary surveillance at 'the boundaries of theprecedented and at the limit of the thinkable'. Its conclusion, 'the unthinkable, after all, is that which covertly shapes our thoughts' may rank as a truism. But in so far as it offered some sort of useable purchase on a world of crumbling certainties, it is not to be blushed for.

In the circumstances, any subsequent, and surely final, effort can only modestly look back, marvelling that the series is still here, and not unreasonably congratulating itself on having provided an initial outlet for what turned, over the years, into some of the distinctive voices and topics in literary studies. But the volumes now re-presented have more than a mere historical interest. As their authors indicate, the issues they raised are still potent, the arguments with which they engaged are still disturbing. In short, we weren't wrong. Academic study did change rapidly and radically to match, even to help to generate, wide reaching social changes. A new set of discourses was developed to negotiate those upheavals. Nor has the process ceased. In our deliquescent world, what was unthinkable inside and outside the academy all those years ago now seems regularly to come to pass.

Whether the *New Accents* volumes provided adequate warning of, maps for, guides to, or nudges in the direction of this new terrain is scarcely for me to say. Perhaps our best achievement lay in cultivating the sense that it was there. The only justification for a reluctant third attempt at a Preface is the belief that it still is.

TERENCE HAWKES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book grew originally out of several years' work with post-graduates at the University of Warwick. The present, extended fourth edition owes much to many more postgraduates, at universities around world, and also to the many friends and colleagues engaged in translation in both theory and practice.

Special thanks are due to Caroline Parker for all her help with preparing the manuscript for publication.

The author and publishers would like to thank the following individuals and companies for granting permission to reproduce material for this book:

E.J. Brill, Leiden, for the diagram taken from Eugene Nida's *Towards a Science of Translating*, 1964; MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., for the diagram from B.L. Whorf, *Language Thought and Relativity*, 1956; Oxford University Press for Charles Kennedy's translation of *The Seafarer* taken from *An Anthology of Old English Poetry* (New York, 1960) and also for Sir William Marris's translation of Catullus Poem 13, first published in 1924; University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, for Frank Copley's translation of Catullus Poem 13, first published in 1957; Arnold Mondadori for Ungaretti's poem *Un'altra notte* and for the passage

from Silone's *Fontamara*; Stand for Charles Tomlinson's translation and Penguin Books Ltd for P. Creagh's translation of Ungaretti's poem; Journeyman Press for G. David and E. Mossbacher's translation of Silone's *Fontamara*; S. Fischer-Verlag, Frankfurt-am-Main for the passage from Mann's *Der Zauberberg*; Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd and Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. for H.T. Lowe-Porter's translation of Mann's *The Magic Mountain*; Faber and Faber Ltd for Robert Lowell's translation of *Phaedra* and Ezra Pound's *The Seafarer* from *The Translations of Ezra Pound*; Tony Harrison and Rex Collings, London, for Tony Harrison's *Phaedra Britannica*.

## **PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION**

When this book first appeared in 1980, there seemed to be little interest in the study of translation. Indeed, the notion of an independent field, some would say discipline in its own right, focusing on the theory and practice of translation would have been viewed with astonishment in the academic world. Translator training programmes, mostly outside the English-speaking world, provided professional courses for business and industry, but translation was not a mainstream university subject and when it was taught, appeared only as an adjunct to foreign language learning.

Today that world has changed. Millions more people are moving around the planet following the seismic changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which saw the collapse of communism and the break-up of the former Soviet Union, China opening her doors to the world, and the end of apartheid in South Africa. The greater facility and lower costs of international travel have also contributed to the movement of peoples, so that today most societies are multilingual and multicultural in ways that would have seemed impossible just a few years ago.

The 1980s was a decade of consolidation for the fledgling subject known as Translation Studies. Having emerged onto the world stage in the late 1970s, the subject began to be taken seriously, and was no longer seen as an unscientific field of enquiry of secondary importance. Throughout the 1980s interest in the theory and practice of translation

grew steadily. Then, in the 1990s, Translation Studies finally came into its own, for this proved to be the decade of its global expansion. Once perceived as a marginal activity, translation began to be seen as a fundamental act of human exchange. Today, in the twenty-first century, interest in the field has never been stronger and the study of translation is taking place alongside an increase in its practice all over the world.

The electronic media explosion of the 1990s and its implications for the processes of globalization highlighted issues of intercultural communication. Not only has it become important to access more of the world through the information revolution, but it has become urgently important to understand more about one's own point of departure. For globalization has its antithesis, as has been demonstrated by the worldwide renewal of interest in cultural origins and in exploring questions of identity. Translation has a crucial role to play in aiding understanding of an increasingly fragmentary world. The translator, as the Irish scholar Michael Cronin has pointed out, is also a traveller, someone engaged in a journey from one source to another. The twenty-first century surely promises to be the great age of travel, not only across space but also across time.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, a major development in translation studies since the 1970s has been research into the history of translation in different cultures, for an examination of how translation has helped shape our knowledge of the world in the past better equips us to shape our own futures.

Evidence of the interest in translation is everywhere. A great many books on translation have appeared steadily throughout the past three decades, new journals of translation studies have been established, and international professional bodies such as the European Society for Translation (EST) and the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) have come into being. There are now a number of translation encyclopaedias, Handbooks and Companions of Translation Studies, along with Readers and other anthologies, many of which enable research that appeared in small out-of-print journals to be made available to a new generation of readers. The important work of James Holmes, for example, who first coined the term 'translation studies' in 1972, is now widely available. New courses on translation in universities from Hong Kong to Brazil, from Montreal to Vienna offer further evidence of extensive international interest in translation

studies. There is no sign of this interest slowing down in the twenty-first century; rather, it shows the extent to which a reappraisal of the significance of translation in today's world and in history is taking place.

With so much energy directed at further investigation of the phenomenon of translation, it is obvious that any such development will not be homogeneous and that different trends and tendencies are bound to develop. We should not be surprised, therefore, that consensus in translation studies disappeared in the 1990s. However, that has been followed by lively diversification that continues today around the world. During the 1980s, Ernst-August Gutt's relevance theory, the *skopos* theory of Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer, and Gideon Toury's research into pseudotranslation all offered new methods for approaching translation, while in the 1990s the enormous interest generated by corpus-based translation research as articulated by Mona Baker opened distinct lines of enquiry that continue to flourish. Indeed, after a period in which research in computer translation seemed to have foundered, the importance of the relationship between translation and the new technology has risen to prominence and shows every sign of becoming even more important in the future. Research into audiovisual translation, internet translation, news translation and the translation of political discourse are among the fastest-growing fields at the present time. Nevertheless, despite the diversity of methods and approaches, one common feature of much of the research in Translation Studies is an emphasis on cultural aspects of translation, on the contexts within which translation occurs. Once seen as a sub-branch of linguistics, translation today is perceived as an interdisciplinary field of study and the indissoluble connection between language and way of life has become a focal point of scholarly attention.

The apparent division between cultural and linguistic approaches to translation that characterized much translation research until the 1980s is disappearing, partly because of shifts in linguistics that have seen that discipline take a more overtly cultural turn, partly because those who advocated an approach to translation rooted in cultural history have become less defensive about their position. In the early years when Translation Studies was establishing itself, its advocates positioned themselves against both linguists and literary scholars, arguing that



linguists failed to take into account broader contextual dimensions and that literary scholars were obsessed with making pointless evaluative judgements. It was held to be important to move the study of translation out from under the umbrella of either comparative literature or applied linguistics, and fierce polemics arguing for the autonomy of Translation Studies were common. Today, such an evangelical position seems quaintly outdated, and Translation Studies is more comfortable with itself, better able to engage in borrowing from and lending techniques and methods to other disciplines. The important work of translation scholars based in linguistics, such figures as Mona Baker, Roger Bell, Basil Hatim, Ian Mason, Kirsten Malmkjaer, Katharina Reiss, Hans Vermeer and Wolfram Wilss, to name but some of the better-known, has done a great deal to break down the boundaries between disciplines and to move translation studies on from a position of possible confrontation. Nor should we forget the enormous importance of such figures as J.C. Catford, Michael Halliday, Peter Newmark and Eugene Nida whose research into translation before Translation Studies started to evolve as a discipline in its own right laid the foundations for what was to follow.

Literary studies have also moved on from an early and more elitist view of translation. As Peter France, editor of the *Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* points out:

Theorists and scholars have a far more complex agenda than deciding between the good and the bad; they are concerned, for instance, to tease out the different possibilities open to the translator, and the way these change according to the historical, social, and cultural context.<sup>2</sup>

There is a growing body of research that reflects this newer, more complex agenda, for as research in Translation Studies increases and historical data become more readily available, so important questions are starting to be asked, about the role of translation in shaping a literary canon, the strategies employed by translators and the norms in operation at a given point in time, the discourse of translators, the problems of measuring the impact of translations and, most recently, the problems of determining an ethics of translation.

Perhaps the most exciting new trend of all is the expansion of the discipline of Translation Studies beyond the boundaries of Europe. In Canada, India, Hong Kong, China, Africa, Brazil and Latin America, the concerns of scholars and translators have diverged significantly from those of Europeans. More emphasis has been placed on the inequality of the translation relationship, with writers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Tejaswini Niranjana and Eric Cheyfitz arguing that translation was effectively used in the past as an instrument of colonial domination, a means of depriving the colonized peoples of a voice. For in the colonial model, one culture dominated and the others were subservient, hence translation reinforced that power hierarchy. As Anuradha Dingwaney puts it,

The processes of translation involved in making another culture comprehensible entail varying degrees of violence, especially when the culture being translated is constituted as that of the “other”.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1990s two contrasting images of the translator emerged. According to one reading of the translator’s role, the translator is a force for good, a creative artist who ensures the survival of writing across time and space, an intercultural mediator and interpreter, a figure whose importance to the continuity and diffusion of culture is immeasurable. In contrast, another interpretation sees translation as a highly suspect activity, one in which an inequality of power relations (inequalities of economics, politics, gender and geography) is reflected in the mechanics of textual production. As Mahasweta Sengupta argues, translation can become submission to the hegemonic power of images created by the target culture:

a cursory review of what sells in the West as representative of India and its culture provides ample proof of the binding power of representation; we remain trapped in the cultural stereotypes created and nurtured through translated texts.<sup>4</sup>

Translation scholarship in the twenty-first century continues to emphasize the unequal power relationships that have characterized the translation process. But whereas in earlier centuries this inequality was

presented in terms of a superior original and an inferior copy, today the relationship is considered from other points of view that can best be termed post-colonial. Parallel to the exciting work of Indian, Chinese and Canadian translation scholars, writers such as Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes and Haroldo and Augusto de Campos have called for a new definition of translation. Significantly, all these writers have come from countries located in the continent of South America, from former colonies engaged in reassessing their own past. Arguing for a rethinking of the role and significance of translation, they draw parallels with the colonial experience. For just as the model of colonialism was based on the notion of a superior culture taking possession of an inferior one, so an original was always seen as superior to its 'copy'. Hence the translation was doomed to exist in a position of inferiority with regard to the source text from which it was seen to derive.

In the new, post-colonial perception of the relationship between source and target texts, that inequality of status has been rethought. Both original and translation are now viewed as equal products of the creativity of writer and translator, though as Paz pointed out, the task of these two is different. It is up to the writer to fix words in an ideal, unchangeable form and it is the task of the translator to liberate those words from the confines of their source language and allow them to live again in the language into which they are translated.<sup>5</sup> In consequence, the old arguments about the need to be faithful to an original start to dissolve. In Brazil, the cannibalistic theory of textual consumption, first proposed in the 1920s, has been reworked to offer an alternative perspective on the role of the translator, one in which the act of translation is seen in terms of physical metaphors that stress both the creativity and the independence of the translator.<sup>6</sup>

Today the movement of peoples around the globe can be seen to mirror the very process of translation itself, for translation is not just the transfer of texts from one language into another, it is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place mediated by the figure of the translator. Significantly, cultural theorist Homi Bhabha uses the term 'translation' not to describe a transaction between texts and languages but in the etymological sense of being carried across from one place to another. He uses translation metaphorically to

describe the condition of the contemporary world, a world in which millions migrate and change their location every day. In such a world, translation is fundamental:

We should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.<sup>7</sup>

Central to the many theories of translation articulated by non-European writers are three recurring strategems: a redefinition of the terminology of faithfulness and equivalence, the importance of highlighting the visibility of the translator and a shift of emphasis that views translation as an act of creative rewriting. The translator is seen as a liberator, someone who frees the text from the fixed signs of its original shape making it no longer subordinate to the source text but visibly endeavouring to bridge the space between source author and text and the eventual target language readership. This revised perspective emphasizes the creativity of translation, seeing in it a more harmonious relationship than the one in previous models that described the translator in violent images of 'appropriation', 'penetration' or 'possession'. The post-colonial approach to translation is to see linguistic exchange as essentially dialogic, as a process that happens in a space that belongs to neither source nor target absolutely. As Vanamala Viswanatha and Sherry Simon argue, 'translations provide an especially revealing entry point into the dynamics of cultural identity-formation in the colonial and post-colonial contexts.'<sup>8</sup>

Until the end of the 1980s Translation Studies was dominated by the systemic approach pioneered by Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury. Polysystems theory was a radical development because it shifted the focus of attention away from arid debates about faithfulness and equivalence towards an examination of the role of the translated text in its new context. Significantly, this opened the way for further research into the history of translation, leading also to a reassessment of the importance of translation as a force for change and innovation in literary history.

In 1995, Gideon Toury published *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, a book that reassessed the polysystems approach disliked by some

scholars for its over-emphasis on the target system. Toury maintains that since a translation is designed primarily to fill a need in the target culture, it is logical to make the target system the object of study. He also points out the need to establish patterns of regularity of translational behaviour, in order to study the way in which norms are formulated and how they operate. Toury explicitly rejects any idea that the object of translation theory is to improve the quality of translations: theorists have one agenda, he argues, while practitioners have different responsibilities. Although Toury's views are not universally accepted they are widely respected, and it is significant that during the 1990s there was a great deal of work on translation norms and a call for greater scientificity in the study of translation.

Polysystems theory filled the gap that opened up in the 1970s between linguistics and literary studies and provided the base upon which the new interdisciplinary Translation Studies could build. Central to polysystems theory was an emphasis on the poetics of the target culture. It was suggested that it should be possible to predict the conditions under which translations might occur and to predict also what kind of strategies translators might employ. To ascertain whether this hypothesis was valid and to establish fundamental principles, case studies of translations across time were required, hence the emergence of what has come to be termed descriptive studies in translation. Translation Studies began to move out into a distinctive space of its own, beginning to research its own genealogy and seeking to assert its independence as an academic field.

Whereas previously the emphasis had previously been on comparing original and translation, often with a view to establishing what had been 'lost' or 'betrayed' in the translation process, the new approach took a resolutely different line, seeking not to evaluate but to understand the shifts of emphasis that had taken place during the transfer of texts from one literary system into another. Polysystems theory focused exclusively on literary translation, though it operated with an enlarged notion of the literary which included a broad range of items of literary production including dubbing and subtitling, children's literature, popular culture and advertising.

Through a series of case studies, this broadening of the object of study led to a division within the group of translation scholars loosely