

# III

## GUIDELINES FOR TRANSLATORS

### 3.1 QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE TASK

THE IDEAL TRANSLATOR will have native user competence in the target language (say, English) and be highly proficient in the language he or she is translating from (say, Arabic). In addition, he or she will need to have (or to acquire) considerable skill in the subject-matter of the work being translated, and be competent to deploy that skill in *both* languages, as a reader in the source language and as a writer in the target language.

### 3.2 DEFINITION OF THE TASK

The task of translation must be strictly distinguished from scholarly edition, annotation, critique, etc. The translator, as a translator, must not omit or interpolate passages, nor paraphrase or otherwise alter the original. On the contrary, he or she must render the original faithfully and comprehensively, with the minimum possible changes in form or substance. Such minimal changes are justified by the need to achieve naturalness, clarity, and fluency in the translation. It is best to regard the task as a trust, a duty of service to the work being translated. The translator may opt to do *more* than present the original faithfully in a different language. But that primary duty must be discharged first.

### 3.3 ENLARGING THE DEFINITION

With the agreement of the editor responsible for the project, the translator may provide, either in a separate introductory essay, or in footnotes to the translation, additional material (comments or notes) as appropriate.

- a. If, as sometimes happens, a classical text is being translated, the most authoritative edition of the original will be used. However, that edition may have opted, here and there, for a reading which makes less sense to the translator than the reading in another, generally less authoritative, edition. In this case, the 'inferior' reading must be translated in the main text with a footnote indicating and translating the alternative ('better') reading.
- b. Where the text makes very difficult sense, it may be appropriate to offer an explanatory paraphrase in a footnote.
- c. Where it is necessary to supply many words in the translation that (for whatever reason) do not reflect what is found in the original text, the necessary interpolation must be written within square brackets (see 4.4(c)), and an explanatory footnote provided.

### 3.4 EVOLVING A STRATEGY

A general understanding of the original is not sufficient preparation for the task of translation. It is prudent to identify and then tackle points of difficulty in the original before sitting down to write out a draft of the translation. Without a clear strategy adequate to deal consistently and coherently with the difficulties, the translation will proceed by *ad hoc* solutions and, sooner or later, falter. Then, portions of the work may have to be completely re-done or discarded.

Since each project will present its own, unique set of challenges, it is impracticable to prescribe detailed rules for how challenges should be met. However, on the basis of past experience, a number of points are always worth keeping in mind. In broad terms, the challenges a translator faces fall into two categories, the mechanical and the literary/linguistic:

**3.4.1** *Mechanical Difficulties*

- a. In any text, old or modern, the translator will need to identify quotations. If these quotations are in fact paraphrases, they must be translated as such but a note explaining the fact should be provided. In some texts, the quotations may be translations from works originally written in the target language or some other language. Those works must be identified, and, if need be, the quotations must be re-translated from their original into the target language. (Self-evidently, translating a translation is an invitation to error.) Note that references in the original text to translated works may, in the translation, become references to the originals of those translations: the bibliography must be amended accordingly.
- b. Some of the works quoted in the original will, of course, have been written in the same language as the original (most obviously, for works in Arabic, the Qur'an and Hadith). If reliable translations of such works already exist in the target language, it is preferable to use them rather than re-translate. Any works so used must be listed in the bibliography.

However, bear in mind that the quoted words may have been interpreted or given an emphasis special to the context of the work under translation. Then, the translator must check that the emphasis intended by the author is, at the very least, not contradicted by the existing translation of the quoted words. If there is a conflict, a new translation must be attempted.

- c. Spelling of place-names and names of persons must, in the translation, conform to the conventions of the Style-sheet. Therefore, it will be necessary to identify, and arrange access to, the relevant reference works

(biographical dictionaries, geographical and historical atlases, etc.) to get the spelling right.

- d. References in the original, in its notes and in its bibliography, must be adapted to conform to the relevant conventions of the Style-sheet. It is particularly important that the items of information needed in references are as complete as practicable, and are written out in the right order.

### 3.4.2 *Literary/Linguistic Difficulties*

Besides individual passages likely to be difficult to express in the target language, translators should try to identify: (a) recurrent words or phrases; (b) words or phrases that function as technical terms; (c) peculiarities in the language of the original which enable the argument to be structured or expressed the way it is; (d) stylized mannerisms that characterize the particular writer and/or literary genre of the work. The next stage is to consider options to deal with the difficulties:

- a. How does context affect the meaning of the recurrent words and phrases? Can one word or phrase in the target language be used to translate every instance of the same word in the original? If not, what degree of variation in rendering that word is appropriate? And should the reader be alerted to the fact in notes or an introductory essay?
- b. What equivalents (if any) are there for the technical terms in the original? The translator should refer to comparable subject-matter in the target language to find equivalent terms, or at least to see how that language handles similar or related topics. He or she may then be able to select words which, though not ordinarily technical, can convey the delimited sense needed in the context.

- c. Words in every language trail a host of cultural associations which users of that language share. This makes it possible to convey meaning by wordplay, implicit allusions, etc. For example, by choosing a turn of phrase that echoes a familiar hadith or verse of the Qur'an, the writer may add an important level of meaning to the point being made. It is almost never possible to reproduce this kind of device in a different language. But it may be desirable to alert the reader to the effect the author intends. More generally, it is important to ask what level of knowledge or training readers of the original are assumed to have. If a great deal is assumed, will it be necessary to clarify this in an introduction and/or suggest further reading? Or will it suffice to clarify such devices, as it were, locally, in footnotes?
- d. How far is it possible to reflect the original's stylized mannerisms in the target language, and how consistently? Usually it is not possible to do so *and* retain naturalness or ease in the translation. It then becomes important to decide whether these mannerisms, peculiar to the author or the genre or the epoch of the work, are a substantive part of its meaning or a formal device (a courtesy) used to establish a particular kind of relationship between author and reader. If the latter, it may be wiser to describe this aspect of the work in an introductory note, and explain why it would be inappropriate to attempt to translate it.