

***Traps of Translation. A Practical Guide for Translators* - Attila Imre. 2013.**

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For quite a long time, translation was considered an almost exclusively human activity. *Almost*, since at its beginnings, translation was supposed to be inspired by God, so the translator, just like all artists, depended on divine power. In time, the translator acquired a certain degree of independence, and, although he continued being an inspired artist, he started putting in his art droplets of science too. However, as we are shown in this volume, both these stages tend to run obsolete, rather fast, we might say, since this rapidly evolving world of ours came up with several man-made entities we sometimes call *translation assistants*, which become more and more part and parcel of the translation process and seem to be ready to take over the work of human translators or even replace them altogether.

Before we actually get to the heart of the matter, let us say that the author of the volume, Attila Imre, is an academic professor, with extensive expertise in the field of translations materialized in numerous published articles in several research areas connected to the overall focus of the volume. Thus, his main research interests can be subsumed to the areas of terminology, machine translation, translation environments, audiovisual translation, translation of modal verbs, and contrastive studies (with English, Hungarian and Romanian as working languages). Given these considerations, it seems quite natural for the author to envisage a larger project, a volume-sized one, that should integrate his previous research data and open new venues for further research.

As for the target audience, the author confesses to have written the volume for “young readers” (Imre 2013, 3), part of BA and MA programmes, who are certain to approach it as course material. However, as we are to discover after going through the entire book, it exceeds its initial scope and expands further, both in terms of intention and of target audience.

In the very first pages of the volume, the author modestly confesses to its so-called limitations, among which the absence of a survey of all Romanian and Hungarian translator trainer institutes and the paradoxical impossibility to keep up, as one writes about this, with the extremely fast changes and advances in technology

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and translation software. However, in the author's defense, we may state that, unless someone writes about these topics, and thoroughly and objectively analyzes their downsides and upsides, even if they run the risk of becoming obsolete as they write, no changes for the better and no real advances could occur in these intricate and rapidly changing areas. Moreover, the professional translator himself needs to become aware, now more than ever, of the fact that, unless he is familiar with and part of this rapidly evolving technical society, he will not be able to call himself a professional translator and will need to step out of the business.

What has been said before can actually be connected to the title of this volume "Traps of Translation", since the author himself identifies as one translation trap the heavy reliance of professional translators on technology, which, even if oftentimes detrimental, is still a *must* nowadays. The danger, as the author perceives it, is that "in the long run, translation software takes advantage of human labour, whereas translators can hardly ever take advantage of their own previous work" (Imre 2013, 16). Another *trap* that the author pinpoints is that incumbent in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, according to which, independently of our will, we are trapped, at the level of thought, in our language. If we go along this path of thinking, we might as well admit to the impossibility of ever bringing to light good quality translations, or even worse, if by any chance such translations happen, they might pass unnoticed. Along the same line of thought, another translation trap will be related to the nature of translation, which is doomed to failure, particularly when it comes to poetry translations, if the other traps are taken for granted.

However, as the author strives to prove throughout the volume, these traps may be circumvented if the translator knows how to turn technology into a loyal and reliable friend, if he treats languages respectfully by acquiring them not only formally but also as culture-bound entities, and if he is enthusiastic and selfless enough to admit that he is part of a larger project, that of globalization, and this fact cannot be helped in any way.

This being said, how can a translator shake off the feeling that he is "trapped" in a world that assists and resists him at the same time? How can a translator learn to work with advanced technology and have it improve his working standard? These are the main questions the author argues around in this volume.

As for the actual structure of the volume, the eleven chapters that build up and demonstrate the thesis are organized in a logical manner, as the entire argumentation starts from the basics of translation studies, from familiar concepts, and smoothly runs its way towards state-of-the-art theories without changing the convincing and oftentimes humorous tone.

To start with, concepts like thought, language and communication are set in their rightful matrix, without having the author take sides as to the dependence of thought on language, but rather focus on the possibilities of language, a rationale that naturally leads him to boldly state that communication means translation and the efficiency of communication depends on effective translation (Imre 2013, 22).

Admitting that “a proper discussion of translation is manifold” (Imre 2013, 23), the author covers in the second and third chapters the entire spectrum of familiar concepts adjacent to the notion of translation. Thus, relying on a thorough theoretical background and adopting a text-based approach, the author clarifies concepts and dichotomies like possibility vs impossibility of translation, translatability vs untranslatability, translation as art or craft, equivalence, or the particular case of religious texts in translation, stating thus the premises for elucidating the intricate aspects that follow. One can read between the lines and see the author’s own critical eye, as he approaches diachronically a wide variety of definitions of translation as process and product, and notices what he calls “the modality of translation”, that is the pseudo-prescriptive, rather than descriptive, manner in which definitions are frequently formulated. Thus, translation should or shouldn’t, must or mustn’t, may or may not do this thing or the other, while the heart of the matter is in a totally different place – as the author is soon to prove -, and recipes of translation barely stand the test of time. As to the process of mapping the history of translation, the author confesses to taking a subjective stance, and opts for an analysis of milestones in translation history.

Therefore, the historical overview carries the reader as far back as Cicero, and slides closer to present days going through Boethius, Bacon, Martin Luther, Dryden, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Goethe, Schleiermacher, up to Ezra Pound, Constance Garnett, Walter Benjamin, Roman Jakobson, Lawrence Venuti, and so many other resounding names. As he approaches present day, the author’s choice of names gains even more in subjectivity, which is beneficial to the reader, as his convincing manner supports the shaping of a knowledgeable opinion, particularly in young readers who are eager to embrace well-grounded views. A quite large section of this chapter is dedicated to translating the Bible, in general, with an emphasis on the Romanian and Hungarian translations, and the analysis reveals the accuracy of the author’s input in both languages.

A highly controversial and, at the same time, inciting area is touched upon in the fourth chapter, “The translator’s task and role”, a chapter best summarized in the author’s own words:

Translators are both interesting and culturally very intelligent, competent, creative, and very rarely bilingual people, who should disregard theories about translation, translating only into their mother tongue (financial aspect disregarded) and find enough time to read extensively, as practice makes perfect. In the twenty-first century, their major task is to serve the reader, offering relevant information about the source, producing a similar effect, focusing on the meaning (Imre 2013, 91).

Although a touch of humour can be guessed here, just as in several other places in the volume, the author realistically and grimly concedes that nowadays, being a

translator involves an impressive number of qualities, just as it had done for centuries, plus one additional quality: the strength to survive in what we frequently call “the global village”.

Even from the appearance of its title, “@Evolution in technology”, the fifth chapter marks both a break and a bridge in the overall structure of the volume. It is a break as it changes focus from what has been described as a conservative view upon translation and translator to a modern conception that includes a novel factor, technology. It is also a bridge because even though it proceeds from a rather negative stance best reflected in Gouadec’s verdict “Translators today become slaves of their own workstations” (Gouadec 2007, 286 quoted in Imre 2013, 103) or the famous slogan “Computers are a necessary evil”, this chapter succeeds in creating a link and in integrating the data in the previous chapters with the data in the following ones. It does so by adroitly introducing, in a step-by-step manner, each aspect that pertains to the modern technology of computers, and by familiarizing the readers not so much with the IT world *per se*, as with the idea of allowing technology to be an assistant rather than rejecting it as a menacing nuisance.

In a well-documented and original manner, the author provides detailed information on computer hardware, peripherals, computers and notebooks, computer software. The technical information is at all times related to the translator’s needs, suggestions and recommendations and informal tips are provided in a natural manner, which testifies to the author’s experience as translator assisted by technology. It is interesting indeed that by the end of the chapter, even a novice in technology will acknowledge the undeniable merits of technological development and the need to assimilate and integrate IT tools in the translator’s daily work. As a matter of fact, this entire chapter incites the readers’ curiosity and prepares their availability to embrace the information in the sixth chapter which dots the i’s.

“@Evolution of translation” offers an insight into translation software, in general. Adopting an objective stance rooted, however, in subjective experience, the author presents palpable data on what he calls “translation hardware” (Imre 2013, 156) – dictionaries, thesauri in English, Romanian and Hungarian (he even quotes titles of reliable sources), specialty books and other printed materials, and then moves on to translation software and search tools.

The actual procedure of integrating all the technical information in the daily work of the translator obviously depends on the type and nature of the texts to be translated. Therefore, the seventh chapter deals with such issues as the quality and quantity of source and target texts, with literary vs non-literary translation, specialized translation (including technical, legal, medical, scientific, financial, commercial, audiovisual translation, a.s.o.). By the way he selects pertinent data from the huge amount of information available nowadays, the author proves, once again, his experience in translating within various fields.. The conclusion to this chapter is a plea for universities to keep up with the rapid pace of technological evolution and to prepare future translation professionals by accommodating their

practice with private companies which might help them stay attuned to the constant revolution in technology. In the author's own words,

The background of the modern translator will strongly influence their ability to survive in the ever-expanding market of translation provided that they specialize and develop a keen interest in constantly adapting to the market demands. This is what we wish for all prospective translators (Imre 2013, 205).

The remaining chapters focus on translation environments and other translation tools among which the author highlights machine translation (MT), a rather controversial topic today. Without taking for granted even the most celebrated theoretical stances on the topic, the author tests MT on his own, on a ST in Hungarian with a TT in Romanian. The test is performed twice, one year apart, and, although the findings show some improvement in translation quality in the latter trial, they also reveal that MT has still a long way to go, particularly with certain text genres. Hence, the bulk of translation is left to humans, who do not need to fear being replaced, but should permit being assisted. This conclusion supports again the general feeling of the volume and so does the chapter on Term Banks and Translation Memory which objectively analyses the advantages and disadvantages of these tools, while providing accurate, experience-grounded data.

Finally, all the ramifications of this volume converge towards the main thread, which comes out naturally as the volume writes its final conclusions: the human translator will never be completely replaced by technology because, unlike other domains of activity already overtaken by technology, translation functions differently. As humans will always be in control of this particular area, the question still remains for us all to answer: to what extent is the translator prepared to embrace technology as assistant? The answer to this question is what ultimately differentiates between degrees of quality in translation output.

Obviously, as the author himself admits, the volume may be expanded with a sequel that should include, among others, a chapter on *Managing Translations* which is to cover topics related to "receiving a translation job, through to handing it over to the client" (Imre 2013, 259), including all the adjacent steps, namely the organization of the translation process (individual, group and team translations), the method of translation (transfer procedures, operations), or the less comfortable topics of time-management and completion of the project. Another line along which this volume might further grow would be *Translators in Action*, which would basically focus on "becoming a successful translator" (*ibidem*), with everything this involves – creating client databases, the ethics of e-mailing or rates and fees worldwide. As a matter of fact, the comprising list of association titles provided in the Appendix section of the volume may just as well serve as starting point for this latter chapter.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the author has managed to prove his point and we therefore wholeheartedly recommend this book to all those who deal in the field of translation, teachers and learners, theoreticians and practitioners who are certain to find here long-sought for information along with cogent opinions and pertinent observations.

References

Gouadec, Daniel. 2007. *Translation as a Profession*. John Benjamins Publishing