

Language Ecology and Language Teaching for Translators

Rosalind M. Gill

Université York. Département d'études françaises

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Abstract

In the age of globalization, there are fears that the overwhelming presence of dominant world languages such as English and French will have serious repercussions for ethnic cultures and languages. Supporters of the language-ecology paradigm for language teaching see it as the responsibility of teachers of first-world languages to examine these repercussions through forms of representation they use to teach world languages. The ecological paradigm, with its insistence on boundary-crossing and on observation of inter-language and inter-cultural relationships, has proven to be a rich avenue of exploration for translation students. The exploration of cultural and linguistic assumptions in the multicultural language learning classrooms of the new millennium provides translation students with frameworks for understanding the profound holism of the act of translation.

Key words: language teaching, ecological paradigm, recursive approach, ecological curriculum.

Resum

En els temps de la globalització, hom tem que la presència aclaparadora de llengües dominants en tot el món, com l'anglès i el francès, no tingui unes repercussions greus per a les cultures i les llengües ètniques. Els partidaris del paradigma llengua-ecologia per a l'ensenyament de llengües consideren que és responsabilitat dels professors de les llengües dominants examinar aquestes repercussions per mitjà de les formes de representació que utilitzen per ensenyar aquestes llengües. El paradigma ecològic, en posar l'èmfasi en la vessant transfronterera i en l'observació de les relacions entre llengües i entre cultures, ha demostrat que és una via d'exploració eficaç per als estudiants de traducció. L'exploració dels pressupòsits culturals i lingüístics en les aules d'aprenentatge de llengües multiculturals del nou mil·lenni proporciona als estudiants de traducció marcs per a comprendre l'holisme profund de l'acte de la traducció.

Paraules clau: ensenyament de llengües, paradigma ecològic, enfocament recursiu, currículum ecològic.

Summary

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Introduction

As a teacher of French-English translation and French as a second language, over the past ten past years, I have developed a pedagogy based on an ecological interpretation of language and communication. This approach uses a guiding principle: if language students are to succeed in their language learning and cultural border-crossing, they should develop a sophisticated notion of the very nature of language and culture. Ecological language learning focuses on interrelations between languages and on cognizance, not only of the structural nature of language, but also of the contextual, psychological and social dynamic in which communication, and the learning itself, occur. Experience has shown that this approach provides the language student with an excellent preparation for the complex holism of translation studies.

My move away from the traditional structuralist to an ecological approach to language teaching has evolved as globalization has come to alter the composition of university classes and the dynamic of languages in the world. In the urban Toronto setting in which I teach, the demography of student clientele has changed dramatically and the teacher is challenged and enriched by a high degree of multiculturalism in the classroom. As a result, student assumptions about the cultural importance and utility of the language they are learning and eventually translating, French, for example, can vary greatly. While the majority of the class may come out of the Canadian education system where they learned French in immersion or other more or less intensive programmes, there is a growing percentage of recent immigrants who are less familiar with the language and for whom it does not bear the same significance. As well, English is by no means necessarily the first language of students of FSL or of those studying translation into English. A teacher of a class of such mixed linguistic backgrounds, assumptions and attitudes must grapple with the issue of how to make the learning process effective and meaningful for everyone in the disparate group.

Globalization has also led to changes in the academic institutional environment, which, in turn, deeply affect curriculum and classroom dynamics. A recurrent theme in language ecology is the lament that the all-pervasive market economy is homogenizing and commoditizing not only languages but also the very knowledge we attempt to create\impart in the classroom setting.¹ Classrooms are over-crowded (i.e., more «cost effective») and there is pressure (on times, even directives...) from university administrators to attract students through job-oriented curriculum. As a liberal arts language teacher who believes that to teach language and translation is to teach human values of communication and that indeed the humanistic way is the most efficient way for language learning to occur, I, like many of my colleagues, have been attempting to stand my ground against the move to what can be termed the de-humanization of language teaching. Faced with a changing clientele and circumstances, and pressure to teach language and

1. See Robert Phillipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas on the «MacDonaldization» of the world, involving a move to controlled information flows for purposes of global marketing (p. 439).

translation as a finite object, my response has been to turn my teaching into an exploration of the meaning of knowledge and of the process by which it is gained, to expose in the classroom the nature of the teaching and learning, the many possible ways of exploring this experience, and the multiple consequences of such an exploration. As I have developed curriculum in this direction and looked for theoretical guidelines for teaching in an epistemological framework, I turned to that aspect of communications theory known as Systems Theory and I have found in the ecological paradigm, which grew out of this theory, a useful metaphor for what I believe to be a responsible, effective, value-centred approach to the teaching of language and of translation.

Systems Theory and the Ecological Paradigm

In the mid twentieth century, after the Second World War, biological and communicative scientists introduced a stream of systems thinking known as cybernetics. The cybernetic application attempted to include all aspects of communication, both natural and technological. In the second half of the 20th century, two very divergent streams of thought have evolved from cybernetics.² The dominant field, that of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.), focuses on development of machine intelligence and represents knowledge as a commodity stored in the brain. Funded by billions of dollars, the A.I. approach has managed to capture research agendas and publications about cognition and learning over the last 50 years. However, all along, within cybernetics there has been another approach to representations of intelligence, information and learning. This has come to be known as the ecological approach and is predicated on an epistemology in which all intelligence is an attribute of an *interaction* and all information derives from *shared agreement-upon meaning*, hence its appropriateness for the teaching of language and translation. The ecological paradigm for communication phenomena represents systems as behaving like living organisms in ecosystems which are all related and which are all in a continuous process of transformation. Thus, learning is not a function of structural invariants or fixed memory in a system, but an ability to «relate in context, create and satisfy recurrent demands as patterns change» (Maturana, 1980). Ecological models of knowledge use epistemology, the limits to how we know, in order to provide descriptions of a medium (technological, biological or social). Central to the ecological model is the unavoidable subjectivity of the observer, which is seen as a primary constraint in a system: the observer forms part of any ecological description. We are dealing, thus, with a science of «observed systems» or even «observing observed systems» of interaction.

What follows is a break down of some of the basic tenets of the ecological model of communication, with comments on how such notions can be reflected in the teaching of language and translation. Possible consequences for teaching are

2. For an overview of the development of Systems Theory, see CAPRA (1996), especially Part II, «The Rise of Systems Thinking».

provided alongside specific ecological notions, but the examples I give here are not meant to be isomorphic with any particular principle of ecological structure or process. I am merely providing reflections that grow out of the paradigm presented. Indeed, all the examples mentioned could be coupled with each other, as in the ecological paradigm knowledge emerges at all levels simultaneously.

1. Connectedness and the Pattern of Life

According to the eminent anthropologist Gregory Bateson,³ a central figure in the development of ecological theory, we perceive by categories and patterns, but knowledge is not found passively in the categories themselves – it arises in active observation of perception of such categories over time and at different levels of abstraction. In Bateson's reading, traditional Western approaches to education misrepresent the nature of learning, in that they consistently divide the study of substance («What is it made of?») from the study of form («What is its pattern?») (Capra, 1996, p. 80). In other words, Western education divides the object of study from the process of study. For Bateson, it is the interaction between form and process, the observation of *connectedness* that constitutes learning:

The pattern which connects. What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all four of them to you and to me? And me to you? And all six of us to the amoeba in one direction and to the back schizophrenic in another? [...] Why do schools teach almost nothing of the pattern which connects? Is it that teachers know that they carry the kiss of death which will turn to tastelessness whatever they touch and therefore they are wisely unwilling to touch or teach anything of real-life importance? Or is that they carry the kiss of death because they dare not touch anything of real life importance? What's wrong with them? (Bateson, 1978, p. 4-6)

The ecological metaphor of the «web of life» (Capra, 1996) enables us to represent the activity of language in its full complexity. Whereas in traditional pedagogical representations, language is reduced to linear trajectories of structure and category such as verb endings, nominal groups, predictable linguistic expression of motivational responses or set communicational situations, the ecological paradigm represents language learning as an interactive non-linear network with several levels of perception. Rather than restricting the study of language to the study of category, the teacher helps the student become aware of *perceptions of category* and, thus, of their «connectedness» to the process of learning itself. There is no set method for such guidance, as awareness can be played out on multiple levels and in changing contexts, as we shall see.

An ecological curriculum for translation is designed to help students engage in meaningful observation and arouse awareness of the diversity of phenomena that

3. For a comprehensive discussion of how Bateson's reading of systems theory can be applied to language teaching, see Mark A. CLARKE (1998). «Gregory Bateson, Communication and Context. An Ecological Perspective of Language Teaching».

come into play in language and translation activity. For example, beginner translation students, typically suffer from lack of confidence in their own translation decisions and from lack of understanding of why they make certain choices. In other words, they have not observed their own connectedness to the study of translation. Self-revision is an important skill for a translator. In an ecological approach, students begin their translation studies by observing their relationship to the source language, as well as to the target language. With the teacher's guidance, they learn to evaluate and monitor their reading skills in the source language, their writing skills in the target language and, of course, their research skills and general knowledge of the world. In my introduction to translation class, I invite students to engage in a process of observation which helps them discover assumptions they may have, not only about their understanding of French, but also about their general reading skills, which always require fine tuning and deepening in a translation class. The goal is to help students come to terms with overestimating (frequent with immersion students) or underestimating (frequent with those who do not speak fluently) their understanding of written French and to focus on deep-rooted bad reading habits such as superficiality, stereotyping, lack of precision or poor general knowledge. Each student learns to identify their own particular set of assumptions and their own history with reading and writing French and English. The ability to recognize the parameters of their own knowledge becomes central to the student learning. This approach helps students understand the profundity of translation studies, as they begin to perceive translation not as a technique, but as a reflective and enriching art. In my experience, students feel empowered by this process and are able to proceed with more confidence and success in their translation choices. «As we know how we know we bring forth ourselves.» (Maturana in Capra, 1996, p. 290)

It is important to note here that this process of observation does not involve reinforcement of the subjective. The perception students gain of their «connectedness» or relationship to language and translation is not merely to do with how they think or feel personally. The teachers' role here is to guide the class so that they place perception within a framed discourse about the nature of patterning. In other words, students see themselves interacting, but also learn about the nature of this interaction. In the end, the student should be able to articulate what they have perceived and observe their perception in relation to various other possible ways of perceiving. The learning occurs in a paradigm of reflective consciousness.

2. *Ecological Systems and the Notion of Difference*

In the ecological model, individual organisms do not exist in and of themselves but derive their autonomy from *interaction with other levels of the system* in which they are embedded. There is constant flow and change or response between individuals and the systems with which they come in contact. Yet, within these systems, there are closed loops, patterns, and networks of pathways along which travel perceptions (news) of difference. Colin Cherry (1977) has developed a systems

model that demonstrates that ways of «learning» a message can be represented on different levels, from the syntactic level to the semantic and pragmatic levels. Each level is a successive abstraction, but all levels are embedded in each other. There are, nonetheless, boundary constraints between these levels, i.e., closed loops within the system. Following Cherry's model, in a language situation, verb endings could be seen as bits in the syntactical level of perception, while formal use of the salutation *Bonjour!* could form part of the pragmatics level. In his discussion of the «logic» of communication, Cherry demonstrates that knowledge of a message is not attained solely at the level of the closed loop in which it is represented. A «truth» drawn from a particular level of meaning is only true with reference to that particular syntactical system. But no system is autonomous: the successful language student may excel in a grammar test, but must also be able to use syntactic information at the pragmatic level. For real learning to occur, the learner of a message\knowledge should become aware of a notion of difference not on one perceptual level but rather in an overlay of percepts. Understanding emerges from all levels and across border constraints.

The connectedness of all levels of meaning and the constant interactions across boundaries of percepts can be used as a metaphor to reflect the subtle but powerful way in which learning emerges in a translation classroom. I often hear complaints from students that specialized translation courses are boring. This boredom may well stem from a perception that specialized translation involves nothing more than learning to access and use specialized lexicons and syntactical strings, in other words, passive execution of fixed patterns. To remedy this situation, the ecological teacher expands the constraints of the system and leads the student to realize that while constraints must be recognized, there are multiple constraints and a wide range of possible patterns involved in the process in which they are engaged. The professor's first task is to disabuse students of the idea that the «truth» they draw on to translate is restricted to a single loop, i.e., a terminological category or data base, no matter how vast or elaborate that category may be. It is indeed, true, that with the development of corpus-based data etc., there is a danger of focussing the study of specialized translation almost entirely on complex data retrieval. This trend is, no doubt, encouraged by the commodity approach to knowledge favoured by A.I. and other knowledge engineering systems.

Ecological teaching would take students well beyond the specifics of terminology or even of content and context of a given field. In a more holistic approach, the professor guides students through an exploration of the meta-context of translating in a specialized field. For example, work systems may vary from one milieu to another and often, their criteria and expectations are based on assumptions that have not been articulated by the employer. Students must learn to ask broad questions about the professional or communicative objective of a given translation. Knowing what questions to ask about work systems becomes part of preparation for a translation project. The professor guides the students in an exploration of assumptions such as terminological consistency, technological efficiency, absoluteness of knowledge engineering categories and of definitions in terminology sources, as well as issues such as the social ramifications of

homogenization of specialized texts across cultures. The student learns, thus, to avoid confusing knowledge with data.

3. Ambiguity and Flexibility of Open Systems

In the ecological model of communications, there are *no finite answers or solutions*. (A favourite *bon mot* of Bateson was «stamp out nouns»). Ecological teaching allows learners to see themselves as observers, recognize patterns, know them for what they are, and move from one relational context to another. In this paradigm, errors are useful dilemmas, ways to help us perceive, and this perception of the context of interaction is what constitutes learning. Context allows us to decide on our next move (Clarke, 1998, p. 165). According to Bateson the «truth» of a message is derived from a weaving of the message with its context and with messages about the context (Bateson, 1972, pp. 275-276). Eventually, errors may well be corrected, but not as a result of implementation of a methodological technique. The end result is never a linear trajectory of cause and effect, and in many cases, learning leads simply to another question. Yet the learners have developed awareness that comes into play in the next context in which they perceive a notion of difference.

Played out in traditional educational formats, such ambiguity and flexibility regarding right and wrong answers can cause conflict. As we mentioned above, institutional notions of commoditized knowledge so in favour in universities today leave little room for exploration of multiple contexts and long term perception of difference over time. University administrations are eager to post easily accessible packages of information on web pages, listing clearly delineated facts that will be taught in a course and teachers are encouraged to teach to those objectives.

We all know that methodological techniques fall short in effective teaching of translation. Indeed, despite the persistence of notions of faithfulness with regard to translation, ambiguity and flexibility always come out as being central to the translation process. Learning to work with ambiguity is perhaps the greatest challenge for translation students. They must, above all, eschew finite notions of error, of right and wrong, of absolute translatability and learn to recognize messages about context. They must develop the confidence and awareness that allow them to find in holism, in relations that can be ambiguous or non-isomorphic with structure, an acceptable translation, be it more, or less, «faithful» to the source text.

A classic example of translation flexibility in the Canadian context is the translation of separatist texts from Quebec. Typically, such texts contain words that carry particular significance in the separatist context: *patrie*, *souvenir*, *nation*, *national*, *canadien*, *Canada*, and even *anglais* are often rife with political meaning when on the pen of a separatist writer. Exploration of different contexts and possible translations of such words in federal government documents, in English Canadian anti-French tirades, in Quebec government documents, in literature, etc., helps students move away from rigid notions of faithfulness. Informed and reflective discussion, particularly in the case of texts dealing with polemic issues such as separatism, racism and sexist language, helps students find their way

through source-focussed and target-focussed translation choices. Class discussions on communicative purpose of polemic texts can become heated. This is the time for translation students to take stock of their own bias and to learn their role as mediator in inter-cultural, inter-ideological situations in which translation choices are characterized by ambiguity, wandering, between «source text determinism and reader response relativism» (Robinson, 2001). Typically, the beginner translation student feels daunted by the ambiguity of relativizing the communicative purpose of both source and target texts. But in the ambiguity lies the very translation lesson to be learned.

4. Avoiding a Control-Design Approach to Knowledge

The ecological paradigm places the whole enterprise of teaching on a human interactional level. If a learning situation is to be predicated on interaction and perception of interaction, the teacher must design a curriculum that helps students become active participants in and observers of the emergence of patterns. If the student is to be a full participant, the elitist power relationship between teacher and student must break down. In the traditional relationship, the teacher is the bearer of knowledge which students attempt to acquire. The discourse of the teacher is, thus, a discourse of control, of possession of knowledge. The voice of the student is silenced. Indeed, in the traditional paradigm, what is required of the student is to learn the discourse of the teacher. In the ecological paradigm, *the discourse created is one of shared or negotiated meaning*. The role of the teacher is to share her experience of how patterns evolve and lead students to an understanding of this process. In this situation, students do not have control, but the language teacher must listen carefully to them. Curriculum design must allow for the relationship between language and a myriad of aspects of a student's life to come into play. Rather than imitate the discourse of the teacher, students learn to *recognize discourse in its multiple manifestations*.

Let take as an example, the way in which the cultural component of a language course can be taught in an ecological approach. When I studied French language in the fifties and sixties, the teaching of culture typically involved presenting cultural icons to students (all the classical moments of French history, philosophy, art and literature: the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, Existentialism, the Eiffel Tower, etc.). These are the icons Bourdieu terms *le poids* (the weight) of the culture (Bourdieu, 1982). As a young anglophone student of French, I became familiar with many aspects of French culture, indeed by the time I graduated with a BA in French I was quite familiar with the map of Paris and was, for a North American and non francophone, reasonably well-versed in French culture. Now, this information is in itself interesting and useful, but what indeed had I learned from this teaching of culture, except for the facts and cultural attitudes that my teacher himself had learned a generation before me?

In *Le Français dans le village global*, a textbook for the teaching of reading and writing in French that uses an ecological approach (recently developed with a colleague), we attempt to expand the way in which the cultural component of

language is treated. The book introduces students to the various francophone cultures in the world and describes them in their various interactions, both to each other, to the culture of France, and to the rest of the world. Most important, the book is designed to make the student see frameworks for thinking about culture and perceive possible patterns of cultural dynamics in their own lives.

Perception of cultural or ideological discourse is, of course, a major skill for translation students. In my introduction to translation into English course, students are required to translate texts that take a wide variety of ideological and cultural points of view. Each translation exercise leads to discussion of discursive assumptions in the source text and how these assumptions could be understood by the target audience. Given the multicultural composition of the class, the anglophone target culture is not necessarily that of the student translator. Thus, a third dimension, that of the non-anglophone translator, is included in the interpretation of discourses. My intention is to guide the students through an exploration of perception and objectification of culture and ideology, including the wide variety of cultural perspectives in the classroom. The goal is to take students beyond the all too compact frames and formulae frequently (and dangerously) offered as definitions of culture.⁴ The ecological teacher goes beyond constructivist approaches to help students «frame the frames» and evoke other levels of reflection. Through this experience, I hope that my students will develop a profound understanding of cultural border-crossing and ways of perceiving the Other. If, as Douglas Robinson (2001) claims, the translator is controlled by the «invisible hands» of deeply ingrained ideological and social norms, this pedagogy, at the very least, places students in a framework of awareness of such norms and of the danger of translating by simply «channelling ideology». Testimonials from students speak of the personal and intellectual growth they experienced in this interactional, inter-cultural approach.

5. *Recursiveness*

A characteristic of ecological systems is that they nest one within the other. For example, bacteria live within the human body. This interaction, an indefinite living spiral, is known as recursion. As we have just seen, in traditional language teaching, the pattern of teaching is dualistic, knowledge constitutes syntactical forms that belong to the teacher and which the student acquires from the teacher. In a recursive view, this dualism breaks down. Knowledge is not found in the subject at hand, but emerges as messages are perceived in interaction with other levels of abstraction. Thus, an ecological curriculum for teaching language does not restrict itself to the teaching of the language per se but is expanded to include the context and meta-context of language as a process. In a recursive framework, *the very process becomes a meta-context for study*. The introduction of frameworks for language awareness alongside the study of language is central to a movement

4. For examples of such formulae (NLP, etc.), see D. KATAN (1999). *Translating Cultures*.

in ESL teaching known as the ecology-of-language paradigm. Supporters of this movement believe that it is the responsibility of language teachers to increase language awareness and counter the overwhelming presence of dominant world languages, particularly where English, for example, is having the effect of eliminating or suppressing minority languages and cultures in the world.

The ecology-of-language paradigm involves building on linguistic diversity worldwide, promoting multiculturalism and foreign language learning and granting linguistic human rights to speakers of all languages. (Phillipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996)

Reflection on language as a process and language ideology has also become a central aspect of a translation into English (*thème*) course I teach to francophones. Using mainly texts about language as a basis of translation, I invite the francophone students to recognize received ideas about English and French language and cultures, and explore perceptions of how the two languages relate at this point in history. I find students' response to this approach most revealing. Initially, many are impatient with the discussion, because, I believe, of their own unarticulated assumptions about language, i.e., as francophones, their notion of language is imbued with a strong sense of linguistic correctness, absoluteness as to error, and primacy of structure.⁵ Indeed, ample time is spent on descriptive and comparative aspects of English and French, but students assume that this should constitute the sole objective of the course. However, by the end of term, and sometimes after the course is over, students come to a realization that thinking about the nature of language and understanding their attitude towards their own language and that of the target language can improve their translation and language performance. As they begin to recognize linguistic ideology and its role in their learning, they become more confident in their language learning and translation choices. Many students have told me that they learned in this course how notions of linguistic correctness in French, fear of making an error, impede them from gaining the experience they so need to improve their English.

Language awareness in a translation class can also help students grasp the complexity of the translator's all important relationship to norms. This recursive approach to language and translation has proved useful in my teaching translation into English for anglophones. For example, in dealing with issues such as politically correct usage, it is most helpful to lead students into a reflection on the nature of language as it adapts to society rather than simply providing lists of acceptable and non-acceptable terms. Another issue that arises is that beginner students, in an attempt to impress, have a tendency to over-write. This is, in my opinion, a legacy of elitist teaching of English in school, where students often come to believe that the bigger and more pretentious the word, the better. My goal as a

5. For further discussion on the ideology of linguistic correctness, see Denis AGER (1999). *Identity, Insecurity and Image: France and Language* and also, Sue WRIGHT (2000). *French, an Accommodating Language?*

teacher is to help students objectify notions of «good» and «bad» English, fully exposing elitist norms in language. A study of the norm as a socio-linguistic, professional and psychological phenomenon and exploration of the translator's so-called submissiveness to norms⁶ helps students take an enlightened and more confident approach to their writing problems. The introduction of language awareness deepens students' understanding of the act of translation and inevitably has a profound bearing on their overall performance as translators.

Conclusion

The use of the ecological approach to teaching can be justified on a number of levels. On a purely technical level, i.e. acquisition of structure, there is no doubt that an aspect of language learned in metacontext, learned in full depth of active observation, represents a true and lasting educational experience for the student. On another level, ecological teaching, with its constant focus on connectedness and context, teaches the teacher to continually seek new frameworks of knowledge and continually learn from the students. Thirdly, in the ecological approach, where the very concept of knowledge is consistently exposed, the teaching of language or of translation is elevated from its technical or professional (read commodity) status: the holism and intellectual challenge of such an approach gives language and translation courses their rightful place in a liberal arts programme. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the ecological paradigm allows the teacher to engage in reflective teaching, centred around a core of human values of communication and tolerance.

Appendix to «Language Ecology and Language Teaching for Translators»

Translating An Ideologically-Loaded Text – «Seule la langue justifie le combat pour la souveraineté» — A Pedagogical Approach Based on Four Ecological Principles: Connectedness, Perception of Category in Open Systems, Ambiguity and Recursiveness.

This article is used as a translation exercise in TRAN 2220: Introduction to Translation from French to English (text of article follows analysis).

Connectedness – Observing the Meta Context of the Translation

- The teacher guides the students in an exploration of the notion of polemic, how it plays out in the specific context of the source text as well as in other translation contexts. Historical case studies of the difficult and sometimes perilous task of translating polemical texts are reviewed.
- Students are encouraged to explore their own (oft-times ill-founded) assumptions regarding separatism and then assess their knowledge of the subject.

6. For a discussion of the translator's relationship to norms, see Daniel Simeoni (1998).

- Students are then invited to re-evaluate their polemic on the subject of separatism and engage in informed discussion, led by the teacher.

Results

- Students become aware of the meta context of the translation and see themselves in relation to it. The teacher's framing of polemical discourse provides them with a valuable translation lesson. They approach the text as informed observers of the polemic and do not let subjective frustrations with the issue mar their judgement. In my class, students learned to identify and overcome subjective reactions to the source text, in this case, frustration with what they perceived as hyperbolic Québécois nationalism and rejection of Canada.
- Students are encouraged to expose fully how they proceed with their translation choices. This exploration gives students a deeper understanding of the process of translation, hence providing them also with more confidence in their translation choices. Their understanding of the concept of polemical text also helps them translate with more judgement and expertise, as they are become aware of the need to gauge the polemic and gauge the understanding of the polemic by the target audience. Questions raised by students: What do English Canadian readers know about separatism and how does this effect the translation? How does one render the poetic nationalism of the text without taking away from the serious tone of the argumentation —students found that English is less accommodating of this style— they judged their translations into English «too flowery» and had to work hard at achieving the appropriate register.
- Beginner students are not always aware of which aspects of the source text require research. Assessment of their own knowledge of the subject makes them more aware of which terms in the text are likely to have existing translations in English (*la loi 101*, etc.). Another common pitfall is that, because of their lack of familiarity with the subject of the source text, students tend to read superficially and fall into problems of *glissement* and vagueness in their translation. Once they are more sensitized to the issues, they realize the importance of following up on ideas they otherwise tend to gloss over without fully grasping. Ecological teaching helps students arrive at translations that are accurate in that they are rooted in the meta message of the source text. Expressions in the text that required research by the students —*prédilection pour le chemin de Canossa, profanation de la culture par les industries culturelles, le statut qui ne cesse de s'affaiblir, les irritants de la loi 101, pauvre loi, réduite en lambeaux, nous en donner les moyens, ne fait que susciter de nouveaux appétits*.

Perception of Category – Observing How Meaning Emerges at all Levels

- Typically, beginner translation students have problems distinguishing «the forest from the trees», i.e., they fail to see how a word or pattern in the text connects to the meta message. Students are led into an exploration of how meaning is played out on multiple levels in the text.

- The teacher helps students observe patterning, categories and structures in the source text that vehicle the ideology being professed. Students learn that though a text may contain closed loops (i.e., lexical items, grammatical structures, punctuation, etc.) all systems are open, in that they interact to contribute to the emergence of meaning.

Results

- This type of analysis helps students get away from dictionary meanings of words and appreciate their full contextual meaning. As they try to understand how patterns in the text serve the meta message, they are more apt to grasp how tone, syntax and other devices form part of the holism of the text.
- This reading-for-translation helps students avoid translating sentences and words, rather than the full meaning of the text. Every text contains its own set of systems and myriads of types of examples can be presented.

Here are some of the systems I helped my students find in the text used for this exercise.

1. Lexical choice is a major meaning system used to justify linguistic nationalism:
 - Victim words: *cicatrices / affaiblir / survivance / émancipation / orpheline / tyrannie*
 - Battle words: *conquête / lutte / combat / défense / blessure / armure / courage*
 - Nationalist words: *patrie profonde / patrimoine / peuple / souveraineté nationale / pays*
2. The first person plural *nous* and possessives *notre, nos, le nôtre* are used to reinforce the notion of collectivity.
3. Absolutes and superlatives are used for dramatic emphasis: *facteur premier, proportions incalculables, tout reprendre à pied d'oeuvre, la revendication permanente, inéluctablement le nôtre, le devoir sacré de l'intransigeance.*
4. References to history are also used to justify separatism: *héritiers d'une longue et somptueuse histoire, victime de la Conquête, la situation d'avant la loi 101, le présent presse le passé de l'aider, la tradition appelle le renouvellement, la lutte pour la langue se confond avec l'histoire.*
5. Punctuation marks are used to show disdain for supporters of bilingualism: *«se convertir» au bilinguisme, les «irritants» de la loi 101.*

Ambiguity and Flexibility of Open Systems

- The teacher frames the concept of the «norm» and the ambiguity surrounding it in the context of translation.
- Students are shown how «correctness» of a translation is dependent on contextual factors.
- They explore how the receiver will understand the target text and what ambiguities arise as a result of target text relativity.

- The teacher helps students explore the notion of polemically determined lexicon. They learn how words are used by authors and the varying ways in which they may eventually be translated, dependant on the receiver and on norms that have been established (or not established) with regard to the subject at hand.

Results

- In separatist argumentation, common words are charged with meaning. Students must learn that there is no absolutely correct translation for such terms into English. In translating this text, I led the class into a study of the ambiguity surrounding the translation of various words used by Québécois to describe themselves. Here are some examples of such ambiguities —*La Conquête*, in reference to the loss of Quebec by the French at the end of the Seven Years War, is not always translated as «The Conquest». Some traditional English texts may use the expression «French Defeat» or «British victory». Again, students must fully understand the meta context of the translation in order to find an appropriate solution to this translation problem. The word *national* is another case in point —translated as *national* in English, this word can cause ambiguity, as it normally is used in reference to federal (versus provincial) jurisdiction in Canada. The translator must decide either to retain the word in French in italics, use the English word «nationalist» or provide a footnote. Even the word *Québécois* needs attention: both Quebecker and Québécois are used —how does one know which to chose?

Recursiveness

- The teacher uses references to language in the text as a framework for teaching language and cultural awareness.

Results

- The article contains many references to language as a process -*multiculturalisme, la loi 101, défense de la langue, bilinguisme institutionnelle, politique linguistique, la langue comme premier facteur*, etc. The teacher uses this framework to heighten students' language awareness. The understanding of the social role of language, locally and globally, is a central lesson for translation students in today's globalized world. The class explored the social ramifications of the above-mentioned terms, and in so doing attained a deeper understanding of the very act of translation as a socio-linguistic phenomenon.
- Questions raised: How does institutional bilingualism foster translation? What is the language policy in Quebec on translating into minority languages? Is language necessarily at the heart of culture? Should other languages in Canada be protected by language laws? What are the language policies of the European Council? What input do translators have into language policy? Do they influence the survival, dominance or disappearance of a language? Does the translator have socio-linguistic responsibilities?
- The students were also led to explore the notion of linguistic ideology, especially that of French, in terms of survival of the language and general

- protectiveness of quality. Students were encouraged to reflect on the ideology of their own language(s) and the role it plays in the world of translation. This raised issues such as the global domination of English, which of the many «Englishes» to use in different translation contexts, attitudes towards «good» and «bad» English, how language standards are gauged in the professional milieu, how software programmes influence standardization of English, etc.
- The intent of this analysis is help students become aware of the paradigm in which they operate as translators. With ecological teaching, students' understanding of the process and of the profession of translation can be broadened and deepened and their intellectual appreciation of translation as an art can take flight.

Seule la langue justifie le combat pour la souveraineté

Premier facteur de la survivance des francophones d'Amérique, le français est notre patrie et les concessions en ce domaine sont l'antichambre de la démission.

Comme notre peuple, la langue française a été victime de la Conquête, comme lui, elle en porte les traces, les cicatrices. Elle aura été le premier facteur de notre survivance ; elle reste la donnée centrale de notre identité et le facteur premier de notre avenir.

Dans son Esthétique de la langue française, Rémy de Gourmont écrivait: « Diminuer l'utilité d'une langue, c'est diminuer son droit à la vie. Lui donner sur son propre territoire des langues concurrentes, c'est amoindrir son importance dans des proportions incalculables. »

C'est pourquoi la résurgence puis la rapide extension du bilinguisme dit institutionnel, à Montréal et même en province, ne laissent pas d'être préoccupantes. Chaque fois qu'une institution, un organisme, public ou parapublic, décide de se « convertir » au bilinguisme, pareille décision, quels qu'en soient les motifs, contribue à affaiblir objectivement les positions du français. Dans le contexte où nous sommes, le français ne peut survivre que si les non-francophones ressentent concrètement et éprouvent quotidiennement la nécessité de le connaître, que s'il se révèle indispensable. Et pareille condition ne peut être assurée que par les institutions du secteur public.

N'ayant que notre langue comme patrie profonde (dans l'incertaine attente de l'autre, dont la perspective paraît s'éloigner), nous risquons de nous retrouver tous apatrides du train où vont les choses. C'est à la fois la qualité qui ne cesse de se dégrader (les médias en sont à la fois le reflet et l'une des causes) et le statut qui ne cesse de s'affaiblir. Nous serons bientôt revenus à la situation d'avant la loi 101. Il va falloir tout reprendre à pied d'œuvre. Chez nous plus qu'ailleurs, plus que chez aucun autre peuple, la question de la langue est au cœur de l'aventure collective. Si nous cessons d'être authentiquement de langue française, de nous penser comme francophones nous perdons notre raison d'être. C'est pourquoi le combat pour la langue s'est toujours identifié au combat pour le Québec, c'est pourquoi, hier comme aujourd'hui, le problème de la langue fut et reste le premier problème

politique et celui, finalement, dans lequel se résument tous les autres. Qui donc, au reste, aurait envie de lutter pour la souveraineté d'un Québec multiculturel et bilingue ?

Lorsque j'entends dire qu'il faut « rassurer les anglophones », je pressens comme tout un chacun que de nouveaux reculs se préparent en matière de politique linguistique. Certains des nôtres ont une curieuse prédilection pour le chemin de Canossa. De même, lorsque je lis qu'il importe d'éliminer les « irritants » de la loi 101 (pauvre loi, désormais orpheline, réduite à des lambeaux), j'observe non sans ironie qu'on a engagé la fameuse chasse aux « irritants » voici bientôt vingt ans. Au fond, pour tous ces contempteurs de la loi 101, le véritable « irritant », c'est la langue française elle-même. Finirons-nous par comprendre que chaque concession, loin d'apaiser la grogne, ne fait que susciter de nouveaux appétits ? Le compromis en la matière nourrit la revendication permanente.

Il n'est sans doute pas de peuple chez qui le rapport à la langue soit aussi intime, aussi prégnant, aussi éloquent que chez le peuple québécois. La langue française est notre patrie profonde, elle nous a définis, nous a nommés, elle nous permet le dialogue avec ce qui, dans le monde, est de langue française. Elle nous fait notre identité et notre dignité, nous permet de penser l'avenir et nous presse de nous redonner un pays au sens plein du terme. Elle nous a fait héritiers d'une longue et somptueuse histoire, un bon millénaire et davantage, qui s'est accomplie sur tous les continents.

La lutte pour la langue française se confond avec l'histoire du Québec depuis la Conquête en vérité, on peut tenir que le combat pour la survivance a été essentiellement le combat pour la langue. Il ne pouvait guère en aller autrement puisque la langue nous définit et nous situe, il en ira ainsi jusqu'au jour de l'émancipation ou hélas jusqu'au crépuscule, celui de la langue, qui serait aussi inéluctablement le nôtre.

Les langues ont besoin d'une assise solide non seulement pour leur expression mais pour leur maintien: quelle est l'assise possible et nécessaire du français au Québec, aujourd'hui, sinon l'indépendance? Il n'en est point d'autre. La langue est une tradition, la plus haute, et une mémoire, la plus ancienne. Elle transmet, entretient, enrichit le patrimoine et l'imaginaire de même qu'un savoir millénaire. La tradition appelle le renouvellement et l'enrichissement. La défense de la langue, et par là même de la culture dont elle est le fondement et l'expression, apparaît comme la première forme et la plus pressante du combat national. Il est vrai que la survivance d'une communauté de langue française en Amérique du Nord n'ira jamais de soi; il n'est pas moins vrai que les mesures qu'appelle cette survivance supposent que le Québec dispose de la plénitude des moyens d'une véritable politique linguistique, ce qui implique naturellement la souveraineté nationale.

Nous ne prenons pas suffisamment en compte le fait que le combat mené ici pour la défense de la langue nationale a vertu exemplaire et valeur universelle. Non seulement rejoint les luttes menées ailleurs mais il peut contribuer à enrayer le glissement vers la tyrannie de la loi du marché, vers la profanation de la culture par les industries culturelles.

Comme l'a justement écrit Henri Gobard : « La politique au service de l'économie, c'est la destruction de la culture. L'analyse exclusivement économique aboutit à la suppression de toutes les cultures » (*L'Aliénation linguistique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1976).

Un peuple comme le nôtre défend sa langue, mais en même temps, c'est sa langue qui le défend, et il arrive qu'il puise dans la reconnaissance de la fragilité de sa langue un regain de vigueur pour lui assurer les conditions minimales de la survie. Pour le peuple québécois, sa langue, toujours menacée dans sa qualité comme dans son usage, est à la fois blessure et armure. C'est dans sa langue et par elle que notre peuple renoue avec son histoire et noue avec le monde : elle seule le justifie, lui permet de créer la patrie et d'inventer l'avenir dont il rêve et qu'il fait advenir, surgir, en les nommant et en les voulant. Ce passé fait irruption dans le présent pour le féconder et ensuite l'absorber, le présent presse le passé de l'aider à inventer l'avenir.

Encore faut-il que nous ayons vraiment envie de durer et que nous ayons dès lors le courage de nous en donner les moyens. Le courage, aussi, de récuser tout compromis et de reconnaître dans les concessions en matière de politique linguistique ce qu'elles sont vraiment l'antichambre de la démissionna. En somme, le devoir sacré de l'intransigeance, quant à l'essentiel.

Jean-Marc Léger, *Le Devoir* (3 mars 1997)

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