

**Biguenet, John and Rainer Schulte. Introduction. *The Craft of Translation*. Ed. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.**

## **I. Quotes From Text**

"*Traduttore e traditore*." (54). [The translator betrays.]

"One habit of some translators really bewilders me; their refusal to translate things they know their writer is saying" (Donald Frame, "Pleasures and Problems of Translation," 82).

"In translating, as in parody, critical and creative activity converge" (John Felstiner, "'Ziv, that light': Translation and Tradition in Paul Celan," 94).

"Translation is not exegesis" (William Weaver, "The Process of Translation," 119).

"There are no perfect solutions. You simply do your best" (William Weaver, "The Process of Translation," 119).

"Misreading . . . is usually what upsets a translation" (Christopher Middleton, "On Translating Gunter Eich's Poem 'Ryoanji,'" 125).

## **II. Text**

Biguenet and Schulte begin their book with the statement, "All acts of translation begin with a thorough investigation of the reading process" (ix).

Reading is inextricably linked to translation. In fact as Hans Georg Gadamer points out in "To What Extent Does Language Prescribe Thinking?" that "reading is already translation, and translation is translation for the second time. . . . The process of translating comprises in its essence the whole secret of human understanding of the world and of social communication" (ix). We learn through translation that "there are no definitive answers, only attempts at solutions in response to states of uncertainty generated by the interaction of the words' semantic fields and sounds" (x).

They tell us "without transformation there is no translation" (x). Because translating is the closest reading one can give a text, translators cannot ignore one word. Translation works this way:

word > semantic field > changing entity in the construction of meanings within a given text;  
individual word = whole of work

but a literal translation does this:

word > word;  
word = word

They go on to say that "all literary worlds are fragments as are perhaps all artistic creations--and translators have to take it upon themselves to reconstruct the total image and situation that is

conveyed through the limiting possibilities of language" (xi). As readers and translators we should not be asking "what does something mean," but we should ask "how does something mean" (xii).

Translator's efforts are directed toward the discovery of relationships in a text:

- a. relationships between words
- b. relationships between the word and its philological and etymological background
- c. relationships between the word and its cultural ambience
- d. relationships between the word and its historical tradition
- e. relationships between the word and its context within a text (xii).

In the translation process, thinking grows out of the situation within a text; it is not brought to the text from the outside" (xii).

They also point to ambiguity as a source of leverage in a text. In *A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms*, Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz point out that ambiguity is the richness of poetic speech that can be brought about by "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative actions to the same piece of literature" (7). They are quoting here from William Epton's seminal work on ambiguity, entitled *7 Types of Ambiguity*. In translating I have identified six different types of ambiguity, some of which are not addressed in Epton's work. These include:

1. Linguistic: Words or syntax may be rendered in several ways.
2. Attributive: An image or figure may lie halfway between two ideas in such a way that the qualities of the image or figure and / or the attitudes toward them is obscured.
3. Contradictory: Words or ideas may contradict one another in the work.
4. Moral: Words or ideas in which the attitude (of the author or the audience toward the notion the word represents) cannot be determined.
5. Situational: Actions of a character or events in the work occur in such a way that they lead to differing interpretations.
6. Generative: Origin of a work is unknown; therefore, a lack of understanding exists concerning the customs, conduct, and attitudes of characters in the text and / or the audience for which the work was first intended.

Human emotions do not change from culture to culture; however, how they are perceived and how they are placed within the "natural environment of a country does change" (xiv).

### **III. Summary**

When translating we must remember that a translation implies: choice, open-endedness, a commitment to a particular strategy, uncertainty, transformation, reconstruction, relentless specificity, a particular quality of transmission, betrayal, salvation, collaboration, dynamicism, qualities of incompleteness and distortion, cumulative undertaking, engaged literary criticism, qualities of impossibility and necessity.

**This summary is courtesy of Dr. Dene Grigar.**