TRANSLATION AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
HISTORY OF TRANSLATION

The word translation derives from a Latin phrase, meaning "to carry across". The earlier ancient Greek term, "metaphrasis" means "to speak across". In both of these terms there is the sense of a gap, a gulf, and it is this disconnect in human communication that is at the heart of the myth of the Biblical Tower of Babel, in which human speech was shattered in a thousand tongues to punish the united peoples of the earth for their hubris in building a tower to reach the heavens. As long as humans speaking different languages have gathered, the need for someone to reach over the divide and "to carry across" meaning must have been pressing. Anthropologists can only speculate at what point our ancestors first developed language, but it is not hard to imagine these early humans meeting other tribes and needing to break the language barrier in order to trade, intermarry or go to war.

It's not until the advent of writing systems that translation really comes into its own. Archaeological records tell us that writing most likely first evolved in ancient Mesopotamia, specifically in Ancient Sumeria, around 3,200 BCE. Clay tokens, used to represent goods during trade, were originally marked with simple symbols, which gradually grew into a system of pictographic writing, and thence into an abstract alphabet known as cuneiform, printed into damp clay with a reed and then set to dry in the sun. Lists of Sumerian deities, monumental inscriptions and inventories of goods have all been discovered, and by 2,000 BCE we have our first example of written translation, with partial

renderings of the Sumerian epic poem 'Gilgamesh' into Southwest Asian languages. The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the earliest surviving works of literature; a ripping tale of a warrior-king, a wild man and a quest for immortality that inspired the Greek poet Homer and parallels parts of the Bible, which says much for its enduring appeal. Far from being a stuffy old scroll, Gilgamesh was the Hollywood blockbuster of its day, rendered into foreign languages so that everyone could experience the magic of a good story well told.

Yet the yearning for a good yarn was not the only reason people started to translate texts into other languages, as another early translation attests. Sometime in between the 3rd and 1st centuries BCE, the Septuagint, a collection of Jewish Scriptures, was translated into early Koine Greek in the city of Alexandria, a Greek settlement in what is now modern Egypt. The motive here wasn't to share a riveting story round the fire at night, but rather to give dispersed Jews, who had forgotten their ancestral Hebrew language, access to their religious materials in their everyday language, Greek. This might also be the first example we have of a translation team working together on the text; as the name Septuagint hints, the scriptures were supposedly translated by 70 learned Jewish scholars, who no doubt spent hours hotly debating the minutiae of their translation just as we do here at **Translators family** today.

In Asia, the spread of Buddhism also brought with it a demand for translation, as monks translated the earliest Indian sutras concerning the life of the wise Buddha, Siddhartha, into Chinese. Religious concerns motivated a lot of translation in the Islamic world too, as the Arabs conquered much of the Greek world and assimilated their philosophical and scientific works. Ninth century ruler of Baghdad, Caliph Al-Mamun, awoke one night from a prophetic dream, in which Aristotle appeared to him and told him

the knowledge of the Greeks and the teachings of Islam were not irreconcilable. Under Al-Mamun and the leaders that came after him, the Arabic world enjoyed a cultural renaissance that Europe would not experience for another 600 years, all thanks to the doors opened by translation.

Religion continued to be a vital driving force for written translation in the medieval period, when Latin became the 'lingua franca' – or language of communication – across Europe, in much the same way that English dominates the business world today. Christian monks across the continent were all educated in reading, writing and speaking Latin, and monasteries became great repositories of knowledge, with monks often being sent to far-flung abbeys to spend decades copying out texts to bring home to their own cloisters. Many of these texts were in fact already translations by Roman authors, of Greek poetry and philosophy or Arab medicine and maths, further developing the shared cultural identity of these cultures. This large-scale international translation effort laid the groundwork for both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to follow, and no doubt has a lot to do with the close ties between European cultures, even today.

In the ninth century, the king of England, Alfred the Great, commissioned the first vernacular Anglo-Saxon translations of two Latin texts. This was an act far ahead of its time, as it recognised how much there is to be gained by reading texts in your mother tongue, and it angered the Christian church, who believed that all Christian texts should be published in 'holy' Latin rather than unclean Anglo-Saxon. But he wasn't the only one who believed in the vehicle of the vernacular. In the later medieval period, Geoffrey Chaucer, the 'Father of English Poetry', probably did more than any other writer to popularise unfashionable English, by not only making translations of fashionable and elegant Italian

poetry but writing his own wonderful stories, all in the vernacular. He founded a long-standing English poetic tradition based on wordplay, adaptations of earlier stories and translation, which still thrives today.

It took some centuries for English to find its feet as an appropriate tongue for the educated classes, but by Shakespeare's day it was a rich and colourful language flavoured with influence from across Europe and beyond, and so the great playwright wrote in his own language rather than courtly French or classical Latin. It's no coincidence that Shakespeare based many of his own plays on the works of Chaucer, whose efforts to translate and innovate sparked one of the richest literary traditions of any language.

As literary trends came and went, so too did trends in translation. The Victorians' interest in all things exotic, coupled with their exacting standards of accuracy and obsession with categorisation meant that new standards of precision became the norm. The goal here was to 'metaphrase', make a literal translation, rather than to 'paraphrase', making a translation 'in other words'. Whereas Chaucer and Shakespeare were paraphrasers, tinkering with older texts, changing the plot, adding characters or otherwise 'bettering' their source material, Victorian translation held scrupulous accuracy and 'metaphrase' to be of prime importance.

These two forms of translation still provide an interesting dynamic tension within the industry. After all, instant machine translation services translate texts word for word (metaphrase) and yet they often make no sense. A balance must be struck between faithfulness to the original and finding parallel ways of saying in the target language, and much of the translator's skill is in finding ways to harness these two opposing forces.

Interestingly enough, even the Victorians were not immune to the charms of a translation that took wild liberties with the original. Perhaps the most famous translated work of literature from this period is most definitely more a work of paraphrase than metaphrase. Edward Fitzgerald's version of the Persian poem 'The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam' first appeared in English in 1859, and it wowed England with its opulent, evocative and exotic images. However, this Rubaiyat owed more to the orientalist 'improvements' of Fitzgerald than the original text, as the translation bore strikingly little resemblance to the original Persian poem.

Translation as we know it today, in which accurate representation of content is valued above stylistic flair and artistic expression, only really came into being in the 20th century, when many great intellectuals began to turn their attention to the nature of translation. Increasing industrialisation and globalisation, not to mention the multinational alliances of the first-ever truly global wars, meant that cross-cultural communication became increasingly important. In the 1950s and 1960s universities began to systematically develop theories of translation, and this was accompanied by a growing academic interest in language acquisition, psychology and anthropology. Sparked by the cultural dynamite of the internet the late twentieth century saw an explosion in communications, with translation becoming a gigantic industry all of its own. Technological advancements have allowed translators to access vast resources including dictionaries, corpuses and encyclopaedias at the click of a mouse, and CAT tools (Computer assisted tools) now make modern translation quicker and more accurate than ever before. As for the future, many predict that machines will be doing all our translations for us, as science fiction becomes science fact. But if you're waiting for the Singularity you'll be waiting a while still,

as computers, for all their remarkable abilities, are still woefully inept when it comes to the vast complexity and beauty of human speech.

So what does this paddle through the backwaters of translation have to teach us? From the start, translation has been driven by the need to communicate in the areas we think are most important: religions and ideologies, scientific or technical information, trade and finance and stories that capture our hearts. Even today, most translation occurs in these domains, so it seems like the conversation hasn't changed much in the last 4,000 years. Secondly, the question of whether to translate literally or with a little bit of poetic licence is still as valid as it ever was, and no doubt debates on this topic will continue. Finally, we can see that throughout its history, translation has been instrumental in effecting social, economic and cultural change and development. When two cultures can communicate, they can exchange ideas, inspire each other, discover common ground and innovate for the future. In a world with almost 7,000 languages spoken every day, translation serves to help us set aside our differences and bring us closer together as one global human family.

Dialect, is a variety of a language that signals where a person comes from. The notion is usually interpreted geographically (regional dialect), but it also has some application in relation to a person's social background (class dialect) or occupation (occupational dialect). The

word *dialect* comes from the Ancient Greek *dialektos* "discourse,

language, dialect," which is derived from *dialegesthai* "to discourse,

talk." A <u>dialect</u> is chiefly distinguished from other <u>dialects</u> of the same

language by features of linguistic structure—i.e., grammar

 (specifically morphology and syntax) and vocabulary.

In <u>morphology</u> (word formation), various dialects in the Atlantic states

have *clim*, *clum*, *clome*, or *cloome* instead of *climbed*, and,

in <u>syntax</u> (sentence structure), there are "sick to his stomach," "sick at

his stomach," "sick in," "sick on," and "sick with." On the level of

vocabulary, examples of dialectal differences include

American English *subway*, contrasting with British

English *underground*; and *corn*, which means "maize" in the United

States, Canada, and Australia, "wheat" in England, and "oats" in

Scotland. Nevertheless, while dialects of the same language differ, they

still possess a common core of features.

REGISTER : +

In Sociolinguistics , a register is a variety of language used for a particular

purpose or in a particular communicative situation. For example, when speaking

officially or in a public setting, an English speaker may be more likely to follow

prescriptive norms for formal usage than in a casual setting: for example by pronouncing words ending in *-ing* with a velar nasal instead of an alveolar nasal (e.g. "walking", not "walkin'"), choosing words that are considered more "formal" (such as *father* vs. *dad*, or *child* vs. *kid*), and refraining from using words considered nonstandard, nonstandard , such as ain't.

As with other types of language variation , there tends to be a spectrum of registers rather than a discrete set of obviously distinct varieties—numerous registers can be identified, with no clear boundaries between them. Discourse categorisation is a complex problem, and even in the general definition of "register" given above (language variation defined by use not user), there are cases where other kinds of language variation, such as regional or age dialect, overlap. Due to this complexity, scholarly consensus has not been reached for the definitions of terms such as "register", "field" or "tenor"; different scholars' definitions of these terms are often in direct contradiction of each other.