| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Legacy of Early Translation Theory: Challenges and Contemporary Perspectives

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| **ABSTRACT**

This article critically examines the origins of translation theory, underscoring the essential role of historical context in understanding contemporary debates and methodologies. It delves into foundational intellectual confrontations, such as those between the followers of D'Ablancourt and the Jansenist pedagogues of Port-Royal, which continue to inform current discussions on fidelity, creativity, and the problem of untranslatability. The paper advocates for a diachronic approach to translation theory, recognizing the lasting influence of early theorists like De Méziriac and Tytler on the field. By revisiting these historical intellectual exchanges, the article demonstrates how enduring issues related to translation's nature—whether as a science, an art, or a practice—continue to shape modern translation studies, influencing contemporary methodologies such as skopos theory and interpretive frameworks.

| **KEYWORDS**

Translation Theory, Historical Evolution, Early Theorists, Intellectual Confrontations, Contemporary Debates

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

1. Introduction

This article critically examines the early origins of translation theory, focusing on the dual imperatives of intellectual humility and scholarly rigor in engaging with its historical foundations. The paper argues that a comprehensive understanding of translation theory necessitates an exploration of its historical evolution, shaped by key intellectual debates that have unfolded over the centuries. These debates include the contributions of the Perrotins preface writers, the followers of D'Ablancourt and his *belles infidèles*, and the Jansenist pedagogues of Port-Royal. Furthermore, intellectual confrontations between figures such as De Méziriac and Amyot, as well as the later exchanges between George Campbell and Alexander Fraser Tytler, offer critical context for the development of contemporary translation theory.

The paper further asserts that history serves as an invaluable resource in two crucial ways: first, by enriching our understanding of the central issues in translation theory, informed by the successes and challenges encountered throughout its evolution; and second, by influencing contemporary approaches to translation, particularly through methodologies such as ***skopos theory*** and **interpretive th*éorie du sens***. It is evident that the challenges of the past continue to resonate today; the debates between the followers of D'Ablancourt and his *belles infidèles*, and the Jansenist pedagogues of Port-Royal, are strikingly similar to current discussions in translation theory. These ongoing discussions, particularly concerning methodologies such as discourse analysis and studies of registers and genres, remain in contrast with meaning-based and interpretive theories. While time has passed, the underlying debates and challenges remain remarkably consistent. This contribution advocates for a diachronic approach to translation theory that prioritizes its historical development, offering a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the complexities and enduring debates that continue to influence the evolution of translation studies today.

The **research question** addresses how exploring the historical evolution of translation theory can provide insight into current challenges and methodologies in the field. The answers to this question can be multifaceted. Firstly, a historical perspective enriches the understanding of contemporary challenges, such as issues of untranslatability and the ongoing debates surrounding the concepts of fidelity and betrayal in translation. Secondly, early translation theories and practices continue to influence modern translation methodologies, such as discourse analysis and interpretive frameworks, which are central to contemporary translation studies.

Furthermore, historical intellectual confrontations, such as those between the followers of D'Ablancourt and the Jansenist pedagogues of Port-Royal, remain relevant today. These debates on translation **fidelity versus creativity** resonate with current discussions between meaning-based and formal translation approaches. Additionally, the works of early theorists, including De Méziriac and Tytler, laid important foundations for modern translation practices, emphasizing cultural, social, and ideological factors.

We will explores how understanding the historical evolution of translation theory can illuminate current challenges and methodologies in the field. The answers are multifaceted: first, a historical perspective enhances our understanding of issues like **untranslatability** and debates over **fidelity and betrayal** in translation. Early translation theories continue to influence modern methodologies. Additionally, historical perspectives on translation contribute to the debate about whether translation is a **science,** an **art,** or a **practice-based discipline**. These ongoing issues, such as the **interdisciplinarity of translation** and its role in education, remain central to contemporary translation studies.

2. Birth and early reactions to translation studies

Every discipline grows through the contributions of past scholars, whose work builds upon earlier knowledge, allowing for the continued exploration and evaluation of ongoing debates. In translation studies, however, the historical context and theoretical foundations of the field are not always given sufficient attention in modern research. As Michel Ballard observes in *De Cicéron à Benjamin* :

L'histoire est absente, par exemple, de l'ouvrage de Danica Seleskovitch, *L'interprète dans les conférences internationales*, de*Fondements sociolinguistiques de la traduction* de Maurice Pergnier, de *L'analyse du discours comme méthode de la traduction* de Jean Delisle, de *A linguistic theory of translation* de J-C Catford. (1992, p. 13)

This absence of historical consideration is also evident in the writings of George Mounin, except for a few references in *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction* (1963), as well as in Georges Garnier's *La Syntaxe comparée du français et de l'anglais* (1985). Likewise, history is largely absent from works such as *La stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* (1996) by Vinay and Darbelnet, Jean-René Ladmiral's *Traduire : Les théorèmes pour la traduction* (1979), and Elizabeth Lavault's *Fonctions de la traduction en didactique des langues* (1985).

The diachronic dimension of translation studies is notably addressed by Eugene Nida in his foundational work *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), where he provides a historical framework, referencing various authors to substantiate his thesis. A similar approach is seen in Susan Bassnett-McGuire's *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach* (1982). In 1979, L.G. Kelly published *The True Interpreter*, which Michel Ballard regards as the most significant historical analysis related to translation. However, Kelly's work does not present a comprehensive history of translation, but instead applies historical insights to describe translation (Ballard, 1979, p. 15).

George Steiner, the Anglo-French-American scholar, adopts a similar approach in *After Babel* (1975), where historical references are primarily used to address issues related to translation. Steiner divides the history of translation into four main periods:

- The **first period**, which spans from Cicero and Horace to the reflections of Hölderlin, the German philosopher of the classical-romantic era, on his translations of Sophocles (1804).

- The **second period**, which Steiner terms the "hermeneutic approach," focuses on interpreting translation issues within broader linguistic and cognitive frameworks, concluding with the publication of *Sous l'invocation de saint Jérôme* (1946).

- The **third period**, what he calls the "modern movement," begins in the late 1940s with discussions on machine translation. Publications from this period reveal the coexistence of several approaches to translation: logical, contrastive, comparative, semantic, and literary.

- The **fourth period**, emerging in the 1960s, involves a near-metaphysical exploration of translation and interpretation, following the publication of Walter Benjamin's essay and the influence of German philosophers such as Heidegger and Gadamer.

While Kelly agrees with Steiner's chronological division, Antoine Berman critiques Steiner's approach as superficial and arbitrary, condemning it for its lack of thorough argumentation and justification:

Nous ne pouvons pas nous satisfaire des périodisations incertaines que George Steiner a échafaudées dans *Après Babel* à propos de l'histoire occidentale de la traduction. (1979, p. 18)

In *De Cicéron à Benjamin: Traducteurs, Traductions, Réflexions* (2007), Michel Ballard comments on the "frustrating nature" of Steiner's classification, stating:

Ce qui nous gêne dans la classification de Steiner ce n'est pas le flou, car il donne des dates relativement précises, c'est son caractère péremptoire et frustrant. On serait en droit d'attendre qu'il développe ou justifie cette classification, or, il n'en fait rien. Nous avons droit à des aperçus sur la portée de la traduction à la Renaissance, une description des modèles triadiques, etc., mais rien qui ressemble à une présentation, à une argumentation qui justifie ou étaye cette classification dans laquelle sont regroupées en une sorte de bloc magmatique mille huit cents années d'histoire de la traduction, qui seraient suivies par un siècle de réflexion herméneutique et puis deux brèves périodes de trente à quarante ans chacune. (p. 18-19)

Translation as a practice dates back to the time of Mesopotamian scribes. However, it is clear that translation has been continuously judged, critiqued, and revisited since the end of Antiquity. According to Ballard (1992, p. 20), the first critical essay on translation dates back to 1715. Alexander Pope (1688-1744) addressed several technical aspects in the preface to his translation of Homer's *Iliad*, which allow for the analysis of style and the problems posed by translation. The practice of writing prefaces to works, led 17th-century translators-referred to as "prefacers"-to present the principles behind their translating activity. Among these preface-writers were D'Ablancourt and his disciples.

2.1 Perrotin Prefacers: The Beautiful Unfaithful

The preface writers of the Perrotin tradition, particularly Nicholas Perrot D'Ablancourt—often regarded as the father of *les belles infidèles*—championed a poetic translation approach that rejected a literal, word-for-word rendering in favour of a freer, more creative adaptation of the original text. As heirs and disciples of Conrart, they belonged to a group of translators unafraid to modify foreign works, often modernizing them when necessary to meet the academic and aesthetic standards of the French language at the time. Edmond **Cary** reports in *Les grands traducteurs français* (1963, p. 29) that "C'est Manège qui a dit de ces traductions : elles me rappellent une femme que j'ai beaucoup aimée à Tours et qui était belle, mais infidèle." Cary further explains that the dominant ideology of the Renaissance was characterized by a refined, literary style, and he adds that the translator is subject to the pressures of their society, stating: "Une œuvre d'art ne se découvre pas du premier coup et chaque traduction constitue une nouvelle lecture de l'original et une résurrection pour le poète." Among the most notable preface writers in the Perrotin tradition were Madame Dacier, Jacques Amyot, and Joachim Du Bellay. *les belles infidèles* played a crucial role in the development of translation studies.

As early as 1635, Claude-Gaspard Bachet D**e Méziriac** had sharply criticized Jacques **Amyot** for his translation of Plutarch in *De la traduction*. Méziriac, one of the first members of the Académie Française, stressed the educational value of translation. He argued that one of the ways to enrich the French language was to make it speak through the works of ancient authors, particularly the Greeks. He was among those who helped elevate French from its barbarism (Ballard, 1992, p. 25). Méziriac himself pointed out that "plus de deux mille passages dans le Plutarque François, où non seulement le sens de l'auteur n'est pas fidèlement exprimé, mais il est entièrement perverti" (1715, p. 412). He argued that a faithful translation required three conditions : "qu'il n'ajoute rien à ce que dit son auteur, qu'il n'en retranche rien, et qu'il n'y rapporte aucun changement qui puisse altérer le sens" (p. 418). De Méziriac then offered a clear and systematic classification of Amyot's errors. In this regard, Michel Ballard states :

La tenue de texte De Méziriac rompt avec celle de nombreuses préfaces jusqu'ici publiées en tête des traductions. Au lieu de simples considérations générales ou de remarques ponctuelles sur quelques problèmes, il propose un catalogue ordonné, illustré par de nombreux exemples, de ce qu'il ne faut pas faire et de ce qu'il faut essayer de faire en traduction, autrement dit, voilà un effort pour donner des règles à la traduction en ce qui concerne le principe de fidélité à l'original" (1992, p. 170).

De Méziriac's discourse is undoubtedly one of the founding texts of translation studies, as it lays the first ethical foundations for the practice of translation.

2.2 Jansenist Pedagogues of Port-Royal

Around 1650, a new intellectual movement emerged, led by certain religious translators from Jansenist circles, such as Vaugelas, Antoine Lemaistre, and Isaac Lemaistre de Sacy. All of them, approached translation in a pedagogical manner, as confirmed by Roger Zuber in *Les Belles Infidèles et la formation du goût classique*:

> *On dirait qu'ils voudraient imposer du savoir, enfourner des connaissances pour des fins pédagogiques. Ainsi reparaît, sous des allures très rajeunies, le vieux spectre de l'écolâtre, du savant qui sait, et qui aime faire la leçon - très exactement la démarche qu'évitait à tout prix l'école d'Ablancourt.* (1992, p. 107)

The **Vaugelas school** proposed that adherence to specific rules was essential for translation to be recognized as a legitimate literary genre. This Jansenist pedagogical tradition, aligned with Descartes' philosophy and advocating for rationality in practice, laid an intellectual foundation for the study of translation. However, it was Gaspard De Tende's treatise that truly revolutionized translation theory by framing translation as a science. His work was grounded in a meticulous examination of prior translations, alongside a profound exploration of the educational potential that translation itself offers. His seminal book, *Les Règles de traduction* (1960), not only presents a comprehensive exposition of the general principles articulated by the writers of prefaces, but also stands as the inaugural systematic attempt to formalize translation theory.

De Tende outlines nine essential rules for translation, which are as follows:

- bilingualism of the translator,
- fidelity to the author's words,
- fidelity to the spirit and genius of the author,
- principles regarding usage,
- use of accurate equivalents to render beauty with beauty and figure with figure,
- embellishment (semantic or syntactic addition) and development (the shortest and most natural expressions are the most beautiful and the best)
- clarity of discourse,
- compensation (the opposite of embellishment),
- and the tradition established since the Renaissance and *les Belles Infidèles*, which aims to render the copy in some way more beautiful than the original (1660, preface, pp. X-XL),

The primary objectives of these principles were to enrich the French language, to use it as a medium for teaching Latin, and, importantly, to produce translations that presented a more aesthetically pleasing version of the original text.

De Tende further distinguishes between literal and oblique translation, maintaining that calques (literal translations) now exist within translation and should be adhered to as much as possible. He notes that oblique techniques—such as semantic and stylistic elaboration, development, and compensation—are employed solely "pour rendre la traduction plus belle et plus intelligible" (Ibid, p. 2).

2.3 Diverging views: Early writings and first confrontations in translation studies

Around 1650, as the essays of religious and Jansenist translators began to replace the *les belles infidèles* tradition in France, English translators continued to uphold the legacy of the Perrotins. Among these figures were Abraham Cowley, who sought to make Virgil speaks modern English; Sir John Denham, who favoured imitation over literal translation; and John Dryden, who, in 1680, identified paraphrase as a middle ground between literal translation and imitation, proposing it as the ideal model for achieving a satisfactory translation.

Despite belonging to the same royalist group as Cowley and Denham, translators such as Edward Sherburne, Laurence Echard, and Alexander Pope rejected this approach. In reference to Alexander Pope's preface to his translation of Homer's *Iliad*, Michel Ballard writes:

> Pope estime qu'aucune traduction ne peut égaler un original écrit dans une langue supérieure. La paraphrase est à éviter, le littéralisme se justifie parfois en cas d'obscurité, mais l'important est de préserver la flamme de la poésie. (1992, p. 208)

This stance contrasts sharply with the prevailing French tradition at the close of the Renaissance, which had been reinforced by Malherbe and his strict grammatical reforms aimed at purifying the French language of foreign elements. In contrast, the German tradition was more accepting of the peculiarities of foreign languages. However, in the mid-18th century, German translators began to react against the cultural supremacy of French, striving to demonstrate that German was fully capable of handling translation. This led to an almost absolute literalism in literary translations during this period.

Although the preface writers continued to criticize *les belles infidèles* approach, this tradition persisted, particularly in translations of plays or novels intended for a broader audience. A wave of criticism followed the more rigorous essays of the Jansenists, with opposing viewpoints emerging. The history of translation thus began to carve its path, often challenging the "bon gout" of the period, shifting between various translation strategies; literal, paraphrastic, or free. While Homer and Horace were the most frequently translated and re-transformed classical authors in France, England, and Germany, Shakespeare, introduced to the French public by Voltaire, became the most translated contemporary author of the Renaissance. Every theatrical performance offered an opportunity to revisit and re-translate his plays and sonnets.

At the close of the 18th century, two key treatises on translation emerged from Scotland, those of George **Campbell**, principal of Marischal College in Aberdeen, and Alexander Fraser **Tytler** (Lord Woodhouselee) of Edinburgh. In *Traduction des Quatre Évangiles* (1789), Campbell provides an in-depth discussion on the history and theory of translation, with particular emphasis on the translation of the Bible. He outlines the criteria he believes are essential for a good translation. Eugene Nida summarizes Campbell's criteria as follows:

- Fidelity to meaning.
- Respect for the spirit and style of the author.
- Readability of the target text, which should possess the naturalness and fluency of the original. He examines the implications of these points both historically and practically. (1964, pp. 18-19)

In 1791, Lord Woodhouselee published his *Essay on the Principles of Translation*. To his surprise, he found that the same three fundamental principles were already articulated by Campbell. Fearing accusations of plagiarism, he wrote to Campbell to explain the coincidence:

> There seem to me no wonder that two persons, moderately conversant in critical occupations, sitting down professedly to investigate the principles of this art (translation), should hit upon the same principles, when in fact there are none other first enunciation. (1907, p. 206)

Tytler's analysis achieved greater success than Campbell's because it addressed a broader scope. While Campbell's work was primarily concerned with biblical translation, Tytler's treatise extended to the broader domain of secular translation. George Steiner argues that Tytler's work marks the end of an initial phase of reflection on translation, during which translators developed theories based on their practical experience:

> This epoch of primary statement and technical notation may be said to end with Alexander Fraser Tytler's (Lord Woodhouselee) *Essay on the Principles of Translation* issued in London in 1792 [...]. (Steiner, 1975, p. 236-37)

Steiner contends that Tytler's treatise represents a summary of a century and a half of translation studies, marking the close of one intellectual era and paving the way for a more theoretical and hermeneutic phase in translation theory.

1) *1.4 The German Influence*

In the mid-18th century, a reaction against the classical "French-style" translation began to emerge. This new approach emphasized the naturalization of the source text, adapting it to the norms and expectations of the target language and culture, which were seen as the imperatives of "good taste" at the time. As Antoine Berman notes, "*la théorie allemande de la traduction se construit consciemment contre les traductions à la française*" (1984, p. 62). André Lefevere (1977, p. 1) identifies figures such as Bodmer, Breitinger, Lessing, and Herder as the pioneers of this new approach to translation, and many of their ideas were later developed further by thinkers such as Goethe and Schleiermacher.

Michel Ballard highlights two core ideas from the German tradition that significantly reshaped the foundations of translation studies:

- **The principle of uniqueness in translation** : "*Puisque deux mots ou expressions n'ont pas le même sens dans la même langue,*" Ballard asserts, "*il ne peut y avoir qu'une seule traduction d'un texte, et non plusieurs. Le défi est de trouver l'expression juste, surtout dans une langue aussi jeune que l'allemand*" (1992, p. 70).

- **The specificities of each language**: He further argues that "*chaque langue a ses spécificités, et la traduction risque de perdre ce que l'on appelle l'expressivité de l'original*" (1992, p. 70). In order to preserve the essence of the original text, the translator must possess a profound mastery of their own language.

This Germanic determinism had a significant impact across Europe in the 19th century. Figures such as Thomas Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), Matthew Arnold in *On Translating Homer* (1861), and Francis Newman in *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice: A Reply to Matthew Arnold* (1861) all sought to recapture the era and atmosphere of the original texts. Their works reflect considerations of imagination and symbolism—concepts linked to German idealism and the semiotic mysticism of Herder.

These ideas expanded the scope of translation theory, particularly in relation to the notion of universals in thought and emotion. According to this view, words and expressions across different languages can be interchangeable. While their forms and combinations may differ, the meaning remains constant. The translator's task, therefore, is to preserve the ideas of the original text while presenting them in forms analogous to those of the source text, with the aim of evoking similar impressions in the target reader as those experienced by the original reader.

For these German-influenced translators, the translator was seen as a philosopher before a linguist. Translation was no longer viewed simply as the adaptation of text X to the target culture, as the French school of D'Ablancourt might have considered it. Due to its relative youth, German was regarded as more suitable than French or English for translating Homer. As noted earlier, translations of Homer were numerous but often heavily criticized. A famous debate between Francis Newman, a professor at the University of London, and Matthew Arnold, a professor at Oxford, echoes earlier confrontations, such as the one between De Méziriac and Amyot. Newman viewed Homer's work as "strange," and argued that this strangeness should be preserved through the use of rare and archaic vocabulary. In contrast, Arnold emphasized the simplicity and naturalness of Homer's discourse, stressing that these qualities should be reflected in the translation.

The German influence, combined with Romanticism, gave rise to a translation style that was widely embraced by the Victorians. Many translators adopted a form of modulated literalism, while still preserving key features of the original text, such as local colour, archaism, or exoticism.

However, if any manifesto embodies the literalist approach linked to the German tradition, it is undoubtedly Walter **Benjamin**'s essay *La tâche du traducteur* (1923). For Benjamin, language expresses a spiritual essence that may be more or less perceptible. It is the translator's task, assigned by God, to name things correctly. Benjamin's discourse is infused with a heightened mysticism. He argues that the purpose of translation is not merely to convey meaning but to express the spiritual essence of the original. Translation is not about transferring a message; rather, it is about capturing the essence behind the message. This gnostic perspective, which holds that humans carry within them a divine spark -a fire originating from God- applies to language and, by extension, to the translation of both religious and literary texts. Translation, therefore, is seen as both a continuation of the original work and an intimate relationship between languages. Benjamin insists that objectivity and exact replication are ultimately impossible:

Aucune traduction ne serait possible si, essentiellement et en dernier ressort, elle s'efforçait à la ressemblance de l'original. Car dans sa survie, qui ne mériterait pas ce nom si elle n'était mutation et renouveau du vivant, l'original se modifie. (F. Podkus, 1971, p. 265)

This passage underscores Benjamin's belief that translation cannot, and should not, strive for mere resemblance to the original. In its survival, the original necessarily transforms. Translation, then, is viewed as a creative process of adaptation, one that brings the original work to life in a new form while still preserving its essential spirit.

3. Exploring Translation Theory: Traditional Issues and New Approaches

3.1 Is There a translation Theory?

Publications on translation have expanded significantly, driven by the growth and professionalization of the translator and interpreter fields, the rise of specialized translation schools, and the formation of national translators' associations, all operating under the umbrella of the International Federation of Translators (FIT). Founded in Paris in 1953 by Pierre-François Caillé, this organization, created under the auspices of UNESCO, aims to promote professionalism within the disciplines it represents. The federation includes over 100 professional associations of translators, interpreters, and terminologists, representing more than 80,000 language professionals across 55 countries. It brings together translator associations from around the world, such as the ATAJ in Morocco (Association des Traducteurs Agréés près des Juridictions), founded on October 26, 2002, to organize the profession and adapt it to the demands of the modern world, alongside the progress taking place in the Kingdom of Morocco; and the OTTIAQ (L'Ordre des Traducteurs, Terminologues et Interprètes Agréés du Québec), previously led by Réal Paquette, a

professional translator and a former lecturer at the University of Montreal. The Order now counts more than 6000 members with recognized expertise. As a result, the profession has gained significant social recognition. However, much of the literature in translation studies has been based on the personal experiences of translators, focusing on the transmission of a craft refined through practice, and for a long time, translation was largely discussed empirically, without being firmly established as a scientific discipline.

According to G. **Mounin**, the turning point for the academic study of translation came after World War II, due to several key developments:

> Après 1945, indépendamment de l'activité des traducteurs eux-mêmes, la traduction s'est trouvée introduite dans le champ d'observation des linguistes, pour des raisons qui tenaient soit au développement rationnel des traductions de la Bible dans des centaines de langues (États-Unis), soit aux problèmes posés par une administration bilingue (Canada), soit à l'attention théorique provoquée par la masse des traductions internes dans un pays multilingue (U.R.S.S.), soit surtout à la naissance de la traduction automatique - où les recherches, largement financées au départ, et désireuses de faire vite, provoquèrent un appel brusque aux lumières des linguistes. (Mounin, 1963, p. 79)

Among the authors who have addressed translation and its issues from a linguistic perspective, Mounin highlights the contributions of four pioneers who laid the foundations for a scientific study of translation. These include Eugene **Nida**, who provided the initial impulse for this study, particularly through his work on Bible translations, Andrei **Fedorov**, who distinguished between different types of translation, such as diplomatic, legal, administrative, scientific, technical, journalistic, literary, poetic, theatrical, religious, and cinematic translation; and **Vinay** & **Darbelnet**, whose work *La Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l'Anglais*, subtitled *Méthode de traduction*, introduced the first scientific method of translation.

However, certain scholars contest this subtitle, contending that comparative stylistics should not be regarded as a translation method in itself, but rather as a discipline that observes, describes, and classifies the linguistic variations between two languages. Vinay & Darbelnet's work has sparked significant interest, though not without criticism. Indeed, the authors, both linguists specializing in English, position comparative stylistics as the foundational discipline of translation, claiming:

> Le passage d'une langue A à une langue B, pour exprimer une même réalité X, passage que l'on dénomme habituellement traduction, relève d'une discipline particulière, de nature comparative, dont le but est d'en expliciter le mécanisme et d'en faciliter la réalisation par la mise en relief de lois valables pour les deux langues considérées. Nous ramenons ainsi la traduction à un cas particulier, à une application pratique de la stylistique comparée. (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958, p. 20)

Among those critical of *La Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l'Anglais* is J. Delisle, who, while acknowledging that stylistics is one of the richest descriptive and classificatory approaches to comparing two languages, argues that the authors were mistaken to present their work as a method of translation and to propose *a priori* rules that are, in fact, *a posteriori* observation. His criticism in *L'analyse contrastive et ses limites : Une critique de la stylistique comparée* is straightforward:

> Pour comparer, il faut avoir deux points de comparaison. En effet, les comparatistes en ont deux ; l'énoncé original et un équivalent transcodé en langue d'arrivée. Le traducteur, lui, ne dispose que d'un seul élément actualisé, le texte de départ composé d'une série d'énoncés successifs interdépendants. Comment pourrait-il mettre en parallèle un énoncé déjà figé dans sa forme linguistique et un équivalent non encore actualisé (en devenir) dans une autre langue ? [...] Il trouve en quelque sorte le deuxième point de comparaison grâce auquel la démarche comparative devient possible. (Delisle, 1980, p. 89-90)

In support of this, Delisle cites M. **Pergnier**, who asserts:

> La linguistique contrastive (qu'elle apparaisse sous ce nom ou sous ceux de « grammaire comparée », « stylistique comparée », etc.) tend à s'ériger abusivement en science de la traduction, dont elle n'est en fait que le produit. (Pergnier, 1986, p. 29)

Pergnier continues:

> Les aspects linguistiques de la traduction ont été souvent traités. Les ouvrages, s'inspirant ou non d'une théorie linguistique, abondent, qui traitent des problèmes de traduction entre paires de langues données. Cependant, la plupart de ces ouvrages sont en fait consacrés à la recherche d'équivalences fonctionnelles entre des formes de deux langues. Ils n'explicitent pas ce qui constitue la traduction, et ne visent pas à définir l'opération traduisante [...]. La simple comparaison des langues ne saurait expliquer la traduction et, s'il ne fait aucun doute que la stylistique comparée rend de précieux services à l'étude, à la pédagogie et à la pratique de la traduction, celle-ci ne relève pourtant pas de cette « discipline

comparative », et la seule chose qui relève vraiment de la stylistique comparée est… la stylistique comparée ! (Pergnier, 1980, p. 23-24)

This reductionist view is also rejected by other translator-interpreters, such as **D. Seleskovitch**, who demonstrates the limits of a strictly linguistic analysis of translation mechanisms:

L'idée intuitive que l'on a depuis toujours de cette opération veut qu'il s'agisse de rechercher et de découvrir les équivalences dans une autre langue des structures linguistiques de la première. Nous bousculerons cette conception en affirmant que les équivalences en langue - utiles pour les dictionnaires - ne fournissent pas la clé du sens de l'information contenue dans un texte [...]. (Seleskovitch, 1976, p. 9)

M. Lederer echoes this sentiment, emphatically asserting that linguistic analysis not only fails to suffice for translation but may even hinder it. As she explains :

La linguistique a, par la force des choses, abordé la traduction par le biais des langues, mais les problèmes qu'elle a détectés ne sont pas des problèmes de traduction, ce sont des problèmes de transcodage. (Lederer, n.d.)

The field of translation is replete with a variety of theoretical frameworks, particularly contemporary approaches that draw on methodologies such as discourse analysis, register and genre studies, and interpretive models. However, **J. Delisle** offers a critical perspective on many of these theories, arguing that they are overly abstract and often disconnected from the practical realities of translation practice. For him, it is essential that translation theories be grounded in the daily concerns of practitioners: "Il est essentiel que les théories soient proches des préoccupations quotidiennes des traducteurs" (Delisle, 1980, p. 56).

J.-R. **Ladmiral**, however, is more caustic in his critique, calling for a "decentralization of theory" and the "democratization of theorization", urging that those directly engaged in translation practice be more involved in shaping the discourse:

La plèbe, voire le prolétariat des traducteurs sur le terrain, est maintenue à l'écart de la contemplation théorique. Cette dernière est l'apanage d'une aristocratie de linguistes qui philosophent sur la traduction, dont ils n'ont pas la pratique - soit pour expliquer ce qu'il faut faire, soit justement pour démontrer au contraire qu'on ne peut rien faire de bien bon ! (Ladmiral, n.d.)

3.2 The Problem of Untranslatability

The issue of untranslatability as it is sometimes referred to, or even "prejudicial objection" as Ladmiral calls it, is a centuries-old debate that persists through the passage of time. Ladmiral, indeed, uses the term "objection préjudicielle" to express his frustration with those critics who take it upon themselves to pass judgment on translation merely to display their knowledge - often exaggerated- while being practically incapable of translating themselves, yet daring to claim that a translation is impossible!

Nevertheless, a rich history, a well-established mechanism, and a longstanding tradition of translation have persisted since the legendary Tower of Babel. Georges Mounin, in his seminal work *Les Belles Infidèles*, refers to this traditional debate which pits the theorists of impossibility against the actual, ongoing reality of centuries-old translation practices. He begins by outlining three types of arguments against translation: polemical issues, historical challenges, and theoretical concerns.

Furthermore, Mounin's work is grounded in the ideas of the Pléiade poet Joachim du Bellay, as articulated in his *Défense et illustration de la langue française*.

The polemical and historical objections to translation stem from the fundamental reality that a translation can never fully replicate the original. The timeworn adage *traduttore, traditore* ("translator, traitor") reappears with every imperfect translation, often serving as a vehicle for mere complaint, unwarranted criticism, or the ostentatious display of erudition. Such critiques frequently lack substantial, reasoned solutions and instead obscure deeper ignorance while prematurely declaring the purported impossibility of translation.

That said, good translations are far from absent! The translation of the thoughts of great philosophers like Heidegger and Hegel is by no means an easy task. The obscurity and depth of their writings present translators with insurmountable interpretive challenges, and it is easy to understand why there are multiple translations of the same original text. We are here referring to translations of philosophical texts, which have often become the subject of controversy. These debates are more about divergent viewpoints than contested interpretations, as explained by J.R. Ladmiral. With optimism, coupled with a healthy dose of good faith, Ladmiral sees in the prejudicial objection a counter-argument affirming the existence

of good translators. De facto, translation is possible. The flaws of translation are attributed to a deficit in the translator's skill, not to an alleged impossibility of translation.

To summarize, of the various arguments put forth by G. Mounin against translation, only one remains compelling: the theoretical argument. This argument positions the sciences in contrast to poetry, with the latter, in this view, being characterized by an intrinsic residue of untranslatability, which is seen as part of its very essence. Such untranslatability renders linguistic transfer impossible, regardless of the translator's skill. As Ladmiral suggests, the question "Is translation possible?" inevitably leads to the further inquiry, "Can poetry be translated?" (Ladmiral, 1994, p. 96). Both questions, in our interpretation, imply that the answer is, at best, rhetorically negative. In contrast, all other domains of knowledge, those grounded in universal institutions, are regarded as amenable to faithful translation.

All arguments against translation ultimately converge on a singular issue: translation is not the original. Given that perfection is unattainable in this context, Ladmiral refers to "quasi-perfection," and his approach culminates in a theorem of "how to translate?" Achieving this requires a robust linguistic understanding, supported by a lateral interpretation of the text to be translated. This, indeed, constitutes what Ladmiral terms the "hermeneutic destiny of the translator," as well as the impact of what he calls "minimal interpretation." This implies that the translator must not only possess a profound command of both the source and target languages, but also a deep awareness of the cultural context of the source language.

Subsequently, the translator enters the second phase of the task: rewriting in their native or dominant language. During this stage, the translator must deconstruct the text into translation units; groups of words that form a single meaning and must be translated as a whole. The initial reading of the result may appear to be a mere transcodage, or what J.R. Ladmiral describes as a false correspondence or "terminological illusion" between the two working languages.

3.3 Translation or the science of practice

In critiquing the linguistic approach to translation, scholars in the field have reinstated "practice" as a central element of translation theory. As D. Seleskovitch observes :

Aucune théorisation, du moins dans le domaine qui nous intéresse, ne peut se passer de l'observation de la pratique […]. La pratique se situe ainsi en amont de la théorie puis à nouveau en aval. En l'absence de ces deux supports pratiques, la spéculation intellectuelle courrait le risque de ne construire que d'ingénieux échafaudages ne reposant sur rien et ne menant à rien. (Seleskovitch, 1973, p. 5)

It is, therefore, imperative to direct attention toward the translator and the processes occurring within their "black box," rather than solely focusing on the languages themselves and the comparisons that may arise from them. As M. Lederer asserts, the translator, who serves both as a reader of the original text and as a secondary enunciator of the meaning they have derived from it, must occupy a central position in the study of the translation process. This focus is crucial because an excessive emphasis on the languages and their inherent particularities has resulted in a failure to recognize this fundamental aspect of the translation act:

Le traducteur à la fois lecteur du texte original et énonciateur en second du sens qu'il en a dégagé, doit occuper la place centrale dans l'étude de l'opération de traduction, parce qu'une excessive insistance sur les langues et leurs particularités lui avait fait perdre. (1987, p. 12).

M. Pergnier concurs, adding:

Toute étude approfondie du mécanisme de l'opération traduisante nécessite une expérimentation assez difficile à réaliser, dans la mesure où la plupart des processus qui y président se passent dans le cerveau du traducteur, sans qu'une quelconque trace en soit manifestée, sous la forme de mots énoncés oralement ou par écrit. Lorsque le texte — même imparfait — de la traduction est énoncé, une bonne part de l'opération qui nous intéresse ici est déjà réalisée, et l'essentiel du processus nous échappe. (1980, p. 224)

For Ladmiral, the study of this process forms the very foundation of what he calls "la traductologie de demain" (the translation studies of tomorrow). He proposes a fourfold typology of translation studies and begins by clarifying that any discourse on translation must primarily be a discourse *for* translation:

En un mot, on ne devra pas attendre de la traductologie qu'elle nous tienne un discours 'scientifique' (stricto sensu), mais qu'elle constitue une praxéologie, c'est-à-dire une discipline ou un savoir dont tout le sens ne va servir qu'à nous apporter

une 'science de la pratique'. D'où ce paradoxe qu'à faire la théorie de la théorie, on est censé embrayer directement sur la pratique. (1987, p. 18-19)

He then positions four dominant trends (observed or anticipated) in the field of translation studies along the axis of time:

- **The Translation Studies of " Two days ago "**: This category pertains to prescriptive or normative translation studies, encompassing works that "belong to the 'prelinguistic' stage of reflection on language, which may be characterized as ideological or 'philosophical' in the broadest sense," such as traditional translation manuals.
- **The Translation Studies of "Yesterday"**: This represents the predominant body of translation studies currently published, and, more broadly, those published since the Second World War. Ladmiral refers to this as descriptive translation studies, which are primarily linguistic in nature or related to applied linguistics. He further observes that issues pertaining to translation and language teaching converge within this framework, subsumed under the umbrella of applied linguisticsWithin this category, he cites the work of Vinay and Darbelnet, *La stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*, which adopts a contrastive approach to the analysis of translation.
- **The Translation Studies of "Today"**: This is the field of translation studies that helps translators manage their daily practice. It is a "productive translation studies" in the sense that it provides translators with "a set of concepts and principles to anticipate and facilitate the practice of translation." This approach involves two key processes: verbalization which allows for the identification and articulation of translation difficulties, and the corresponding solutions and conceptualization; a process leading to the formulation of conceptual elements, creating a fragmented theory that acts as a "toolbox" from which the translator can draw as needed. (1987, p. 20-21) As Ladmiral further asserts:
- À notre sens, la théorie de la traduction n'a pas tant à apporter du savoir supplémentaire qu'à fournir des concepts clés grâce auxquels on pourra 'parler' la pratique traduisante, la verbaliser et la conceptualiser tout à la fois. (1987, p. 212)
- **The Translation Studies of " Tomorrow"**: This refers to scientific or inductive translation studies, which focus on the cognitive processes occurring within the minds of translators. Rather than engaging in retrospective analysis of completed translations, this approach aims to investigate the process preceding the act of translation itself. Ladmiral underscores that this field is still in its infancy, with substantial further development anticipated.

3.4 Translation Theory: Contemporary Approaches

Contemporary translation theory encompasses several influential approaches that aim to address the complexities of translating across languages and cultures.

The **linguistic approaches to the text** focus on analyzing the structure and function of the original text. Reiss's **Text Type Theory** classifies texts into three categories: informative, expressive, and operative. Each type requires different translation strategies based on its purpose and function. **Skopos Theory**, which emphasizes the purpose (or 'skopos') of the translation, asserts that the translation should prioritize the function of the target text over an exact replica of the source. Within this framework, **Vermeer's approach** stresses the translator's role in ensuring the target text fulfills its intended purpose, while **Nord's approach** emphasizes balancing the loyalty to the source text and the needs of the target audience.

Another significant area of translation theory examines the role of **discourse analysis, registers, and genres** in translation. **Baker's approach** underscores the importance of context and cultural factors in translation, recognizing that meanings may shift depending on social and cultural environments. Similarly, **Hatim & Mason's approach** stresses the importance of context, genre, and the intended purpose of the translation, aiming for effective communication across languages.

Finally, the **interpretive approach**, often referred to as the theory of meaning, focuses on conveying the intended sense of the original text rather than performing a literal translation. **Seleskovitch's approach** advocates for re-expressing the meaning of the source text in a way that resonates with the target language and culture. **Delisle's approach**, while similar, stresses the balance of reconstructing meaning between the source and target cultures, highlighting the role of cultural mediation in the translation process.

Theories of Learning and Pedagogy in Translation, also includes various contemporary approaches to translation pedagogy as outlined by **Kelly**. These approaches reflect the evolution of translation teaching, focusing on different aspects of the learning process:

- The *Traditional Approaches* are foundational methods that emphasize direct teaching techniques and focus on the linguistic aspects of translation, often relying on traditional exercises and rote learning.

- The *Objective-Based Approach (APO)* is a goal-oriented model where the focus is on achieving predefined learning outcomes. It encourages learners to work toward specific, measurable objectives, making the learning process more structured and outcome-driven Jean Delisle's *Task-Based Approach* emphasizes practical, real-world translation tasks as the core of the learning process. It prioritizes the development of translation skills through hands-on experience rather than theoretical study. By focusing on the translation process itself, learners are encouraged to engage in authentic tasks that mirror professional challenges. This approach fosters learner autonomy, problem-solving, and critical thinking, as students tackle diverse texts and receive constructive feedback. Ultimately, Delisle's model prepares learners to adapt to the complexities of professional translation by honing both their technical and cognitive skills.
- The *Learner-Centered and Profession-Centered Approach* places emphasis on both the individual needs of the learner and the demands of the professional translation world. This dual focus ensures that learners are not only gaining translation skills but also developing an understanding of the practical applications and professional standards of the field.
- The *Process-Centered Approach* shifts the focus from the final product of translation to the steps and strategies involved in the translation process itself. This approach encourages students to reflect on their cognitive processes and the decisions they make during translation tasks.
- *Cognitive and Psycholinguistic Research Applied to Translator Training* draws on insights from cognitive science and psycholinguistics to inform how translators process language and information. This research underpins methods that aim to enhance cognitive efficiency and decision-making in translation.
- The *Situational Approach* adapts the teaching process to the specific contexts in which translation is practiced. It emphasizes the importance of context, recognizing that translation strategies must vary according to the environment and the task at hand.
- The *Task-Based Approach (APT)* centers on completing practical tasks as a method of learning. By engaging in real-world translation tasks, learners develop problem-solving abilities and learn through direct experience, applying theories and strategies in concrete situations.
- *Conscious Analysis and Subliminal Discovery* focuses on cultivating self-awareness in translation students. This approach encourages learners to analyze their thinking processes consciously while also discovering subtler, often subconscious patterns that influence translation decisions.
- Finally, the *Socioconstructivist Approach* stresses the role of social interaction and collaborative learning. This model posits that knowledge is constructed through engagement with peers, feedback, and the exchange of ideas, reflecting a more interactive and participatory learning environment.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article critically examines the early origins of translation theory, emphasizing the lasting relevance of foundational debates that continue to shape contemporary translation studies. Despite the proliferation of new approaches, issues such as the tension between fidelity and creativity, the complexities of untranslatability, and the balance between meaning and form remain central to current discussions in the field. The historical evolution of translation theory, from the intellectual exchanges among the followers of D'Ablancourt and the Jansenist pedagogues of Port-Royal to the development of modern frameworks such as Skopos theory and interpretive approaches, demonstrates that the core concerns first articulated by early theorists still resonate today.

The research underscores the importance of examining the historical foundations of translation theory to better understand present challenges and methodologies. Intellectual confrontations, such as those between De Méziriac and Amyot or George Campbell and Alexander Fraser Tytler, have left an enduring mark on modern translation debates, particularly regarding the cultural, social, and ideological dimensions of translation. These early contributions continue to inform both the pedagogical and practical aspects of translation, reinforcing the significance of historical perspectives.

Although contemporary methodologies have expanded the scope of translation theory, they often revisit or reinterpret the key issues raised by early theorists. The ongoing discourse between meaning-based and form-based translation approaches, for instance, mirrors debates that have persisted over centuries. Modern methodologies such as discourse analysis, genre studies, and interpretive frameworks continue to address the same central issues—fidelity, creativity, and the transfer of meaning—that concerned earlier scholars.

Looking ahead, further engagement with the historical development of translation theory offers valuable insights for addressing current and future challenges within the discipline. The continuity of these foundational debates invites further scholarly inquiry into the dynamic nature of translation, contributing to the refinement of contemporary methodologies. Recognizing the enduring relevance of these issues can deepen our understanding of translation as an interdisciplinary practice, bridging languages, cultures, and ideologies.

Moreover, the historical examination of translation theory sheds light on essential concepts such as untranslatability, the challenges of balancing meaning-based and formal approaches, and the importance of context in translation. Early intellectual confrontations, such as those between figures like De Méziriac and Amyot, laid the groundwork for modern translation practices that account for the cultural, social, and ideological dimensions of translation.

The research question posed in this paper—how exploring the historical evolution of translation theory can provide insight into current challenges—finds its answer in the realization that historical perspectives offer invaluable guidance for contemporary translation theory. By understanding the evolution of translation theory, we gain deeper insights into issues like untranslatability and debates surrounding fidelity and betrayal in translation. Additionally, the contributions of early theorists continue to shape current methodologies, whether through discourse analysis, Skopos theory, or interpretive approaches to meaning. These enduring issues highlight translation's interdisciplinary nature, its crucial role in education, and its status as a practice-based discipline, emphasizing the importance of historical reflection for a more nuanced understanding of translation studies today.

Finally, the theoretical models explored in this study underline the inherently interdisciplinary nature of translation as a tool for communication. In response to the often-debated question, "Does translation belong to a theory?"—a question that frequently sparks discourse between translators and scholars—it can be asserted that translation indeed demands significant intellectual creativity. However, this is not its only requirement. The practice of translation also necessitates diligent study, the accumulation of knowledge, and, perhaps most importantly, unwavering perseverance. Even in moments of frustration, when a translator, regardless of their expertise, encounters difficulty with a challenging passage, this feeling of impotence can paradoxically become the driving force that propels them forward. Over time, through continuous effort and resilience, the translator gradually masters the intricacies of their languages, overcoming the sense of incapacity that once impeded their progress—myself included—throughout their careers.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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