

work, and suffer him not for to err. Also this word *ex* signifies sometimes *of*, and sometimes it signifies *by*, as Jerome says; and this word *enim* signifies commonly *forsooth*, and, as Jerome says, it signifies *cause*, *thus*, *because*; and this word *secundum* is taken for *after* [according to], as many men say, and commonly, but it signifies well *by*, or *up*, thus *by your word*, or *up your word*. Many such adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions be set often one for another, and at free choice of authors sometimes; and now they shall be taken as it accords best to the sentence. By this manner, with good living and great travail, men may come to true and and clear translating, and true understanding of holy writ, seem it never so hard⁹ at the beginning. God grant to us all grace to con well, and keep well holy writ, and suffer joyfully some pain for it at the last! Amen.

Leonardo Bruni

Usually referred to in his own day as Leonardo Aretino ('Leonardo of Arezzo'), Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) was an Italian humanist, statesman, and man of letters whose most lasting accomplishments included translations of Plato, Aristotle, Petrarch, and other Greek writers into Latin and Italian biographies of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.

Born and raised in the provincial town of Arezzo, the son of a grain merchant, Bruni was regarded as something of an upstart and an outsider in the Florence to which he moved in his early twenties to continue his education. Despite his lack of family ties in Florence, he was adopted 'like a son' by the city chancellor Coluccio Salutati. Having learned Greek in his late twenties, he began translating classic Greek texts into Latin, and soon found himself in the middle of a controversy that was raging over whether schoolboys should be allowed to read prechristian classics. From age 35 to 45 he served as 'apostolic' or papal secretary to four Roman popes, for whom he drafted papal bulls to a variety of correspondents. His work placed him in the middle of controversies between the Roman and the Avignonese popes and between the pope and the Roman people for signorial control of the city; Bruni's sympathies were entirely with the Roman pope, and his efforts helped consolidate papal power.

Bruni's most productive scholarly period was from 1415 to his appointment in 1427 as chancellor of Florence; it was during this period that he wrote most of his biographies and histories,

though he did not complete the lives of Dante and Petrarch until early in his term as chancellor, which continued until his death in 1444. During his lifetime and for about a century after his death, Bruni was an internationally renowned Florentine scholar and statesman and a best-selling author (Bruni manuscripts number in the thousands, more than any other Renaissance author); his most popular works were his Latin translations of Aristotle.

On the Correct Way to Translate (De interpretatione recta, 1424/26)

Translated by James Hankins

Some time ago I translated from Greek into Latin Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and added to it a preface in which I discussed and refuted a great many mistakes made by the old translator.¹ There are some persons, as I now hear, who are critical of my refutation as having been too ungentle. They say that, whatever his errors, the old translator brought his work before the public in good faith, to the extent of his understanding, and deserves therefor not blame, but praise. The well-regulated disputant (they say) does not as a rule expose obvious slips in such detail, but prefers concrete refutation to verbal harassment.

Now I admit that I was rather more heated in my criticism than I ought to have been, but the reason was my sense of indignation. It gave me real pain, anguish even, to see books that in Greek were filled with elegance, delight, and a certain fathomless beauty, defiled and disfigured in Latin by the worst sort of translationese. Suppose I were enjoying a delightful and well-executed painting of Protagenes, say, or Apelles or Aglaophontes, and it should be vandalized. Surely that would be unbearable, and grounds for anger – grounds, indeed, for verbal and physical retaliation against the vandal. In the same way it was for me a source of mental suffering and violent agitation to see thus defiled the works of Aristotle, more brilliant and well-executed than any picture. So if I have seemed to anyone too heated, let him know that that was the cause, a cause surely of such a kind as ought to deserve some excuse, even though it exceeded the mean.

Not that, in my opinion, I *did* exceed the mean. I was angry, to be sure, but I observed discretion and humanity throughout. For consider: did I say anything

¹ The 'old translator' was William of Moerbeke, who was until Bruni the most renowned Latin translator of Aristotle. At the urging of his colleague Thomas Aquinas, usually a proponent of sense-for-sense translation, Moerbeke made his translations literal cribs for the use of scholastics. Bruni's refutation is "Preface to the Appearance of a New Translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*". [Ed]

⁹ I.e., no matter how hard it seems. [Ed]

against his behavior? His life? Did I accuse him of perfidy, or wickedness, or lust? Surely not. What then did I allege against him? Only his ignorance of literature. And what, by God Immortal, does that amount to? Surely a man can be morally good, and yet be wanting in that extensive knowledge I require of him; he might, for that matter, lack any knowledge of letters at all. I did not say he was a bad man, only a bad translator. I might as easily say the same of Plato if he wanted to be the navigator of a ship, but had no knowledge of navigation. I should be detracting nothing from his philosophy, I should only be criticizing the circumstance that he would be ignorant and incapable as a navigator.

In order that the whole subject may be understood from a broader perspective, I shall first of all explain to you my opinion of the correct way to translate. I shall then explain why my criticisms were justified. Thirdly, I shall show that, in criticizing his errors, I have followed the practice of the most learned men.

In my view, then, the whole essence of translation is to transfer correctly what is written in one language into another language. But no one can do this correctly who has not a wide and extensive knowledge of both languages. Nor is even that enough. There are many men who have the capacity to understand an activity, though they cannot themselves exercise it. Many persons, for instance, appreciate painting who cannot themselves paint, and many understand the art of music without themselves being able to sing.

Correct translation is therefore an extremely difficult task. One must have, first of all, a knowledge of the language to be translated, and no small or common knowledge at that, but one that is wide, idiomatic, accurate, and detailed, acquired from a long reading of the philosophers and orators and poets and all other writers. No one who has not read, comprehended, thoroughly considered and retained all these can possibly grasp the force and significance of the words, especially since Aristotle himself and Plato were, I may say, the very greatest masters of literature, and practiced a most elegant kind of writing filled with the sayings and maxims of the old poets and orators and historians, and frequently employed tropes and figures of speech that have acquired idiomatic meanings far different from their literal meanings. We in our language, for instance, employ such expressions as 'I humor you', 'soldiers lost in battle', 'take in good part', 'it would be worthwhile', 'to take pains', and a thousand others like them. The rawest schoolboy knows what 'pains' are, and what 'to take' means, but the whole phrase means something else. To say 'a hundred soldiers were lost in battle', means, literally, that 'a hundred soldiers cannot be found'. It is the same with the other examples: the words mean one thing, the sense is another. 'Deprecor hoc' (lit. 'I pray for')

has a negative sense ('I ward off'). The raw and inexperienced schoolboy will understand something as being desired, instead of deprecated, and if required to translate, will give me a meaning the opposite of the one in the original language. The words 'youth' and 'youths' have different meanings: the first means a time of life, the other, a number of young men. "If that youth should be mine", says Vergil, and elsewhere, "In their first flower the youths exercise their horses", and Livy says, "when the youths were armed, they made an incursion into Roman territory". The expression 'to be free from' has a positive sense, while 'to lack' is pejorative. We say 'something is lacking' when we mean something good is lacking, as for example when we say that an orator lacks good diction, or an actor lacks effective gestures. We use the expression 'to be free from' when we mean 'free from something bad', as for instance, when a doctor is free from ignorance, or a lawyer from corruption. 'Penalty' and 'evil' seem closely related, but in fact are far different. 'To pay a penalty' means to suffer or undergo it; 'to pay evil for evil' means to bring an evil on someone else. On the other hand, what words could ever appear more dissimilar than the words 'accept' and 'grant'? Yet they are sometimes synonymous. For when we say 'I grant you that', it means the same as 'I accept it'. I could mention practically unlimited idioms of this kind which the ill-educated person might easily misunderstand. He who fails to take them into account will mistake one thing for another.

Again, we frequently make use of brief allusions to suggest complete thoughts, as when Juvenal, quoting Vergil's phrase "the spoil of Auruncan Actor", speaks in jest about a mirror. "Would that never in Pelion's wood" is a phrase that alludes to the origin and primitive cause of an evil. Such allusions are very common in Greek authors. Even Plato in many instances employs them, and Aristotle, too, commonly uses them. He applies the Homeric phrase "when two go together" to the power and strength of friendship. In his *Politics* he describes a dishonored exile by quoting the oration Achilles made to the ambassadors of Ajax. He uses the words spoken by the Trojan elders about Helen's beauty and grace as a figure for the nature of pleasure. Much could be said on this score. The Greek language covers a broad field, and there are innumerable examples in Aristotle and Plato of illustrations drawn from Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Euripides, and other ancient poets and writers. Then, too, there is a frequent use of figures of speech, so that a man not familiar with a wide variety of every kind of author is likely to be misled and to mistake the sense of what he is to translate.

Agreed, then, that the first concern of the translator is to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language out of which he translates, and that this knowledge can

only be achieved by a repeated, varied and close reading of all kinds of writers. Next he must have such a grasp of the language into which he translates, that he will have a thorough command of it, have it completely within his power, so when he must render word for word, he will not beg or borrow or leave the word in Greek out of ignorance of Latin; he will know subtly the nature and the force of words, so he will not say 'middling' when he means 'small', 'adolescent' when he means 'adolescence', 'courage' when he means 'strength', 'war' when he means 'battle', 'city' when he means 'city-state'. He will moreover observe the distinctions between 'to be fond of' and 'to love', between 'to choose out' and 'to seek out', between 'to desire' and 'to wish', 'to perorate' and 'to persuade', 'to accept' and 'to grant', 'to expostulate with' and 'to complain of', and a thousand similar cases. He will be familiar with the idioms and figures of speech used by the best authors, and will imitate them when he translates, and he will avoid verbal and grammatical novelties, especially those that are imprecise and barbarous.

The foregoing qualities are all necessary. In addition, he must possess a sound ear so that his translation does not disturb and destroy the fullness and rhythmical qualities of the original. For since in every good writer – and most especially in Plato and Aristotle – there is both learning and literary style, he and he only will be a satisfactory translator who is able to preserve both.

In short, these are the vices of a translator: to understand badly what is to be translated, or to turn it badly; and to translate in such fashion that the beauty and precision of the original author is rendered clumsy, confused, and ugly. The man whose ignorance of learning and literature is such that he cannot avoid all those vices, is rightfully criticized and condemned when he tries to translate. By mistaking one thing for another, he leads men into diverse errors, and by making him seem ridiculous and absurd he threatens the majesty of his original author.

So it is by no means correct to say that, in the case of those arts which demand knowledge, the man who makes public his efforts deserves not blame, but praise. A poet who made bad verses would not deserve praise, even if he tried to make them good: we would criticize and condemn him for attempting a thing he knew nothing about. We would blame a sculptor who spoils a statue even though it were the result of ignorance rather than of bad faith. Just as men who copy a painting borrow the shape, attitude, stance and general appearance therefrom, not thinking what they themselves would do, but what another has done; so in translation the best translator will turn his whole mind, heart, and will to his original author, and in a sense transform him, considering how he may express the shape, attitude and stance of his speech, and all his lines and colors.

By this means, marvellous success is obtained. For every writer has his proper style: Cicero his sonority and richness, Sallust his dry and succinct expression, Livy his rough grandeur. So the good translator in translating each will conform himself to them in such a way that he follows the style of each one. Hence, if he is translating Cicero, with a variety and richness of expression matching his, the translator must fill up the entire period with large, copious, and full phrasings, now rushing them along, now building them up. If he translates Sallust, he must needs decide in the case of nearly every word to observe propriety and great restraint, and to this end must retrench and cut down. If he translates Livy, he must imitate the latter's forms of expression. The translator should be carried away by the power of the original's style. He cannot possibly preserve the sense to advantage unless he insinuates and twists himself into the original's word order and periodic structure with verbal propriety and stylistic faithfulness. This then is the best way to translate: to preserve the style of the original as well as possible, so that polish and elegance be not lacking in the words, and the words be not lacking in meaning.

Correct translation, because of the many and varied talents it requires, which we have mentioned above, is difficult enough, but it is surpassingly difficult to translate correctly when the original author has written with a sense of prose rhythm and literary polish. For in rhythmic prose, one must carefully observe and follow the cola [clauses or clause-groups], commata [smaller groups of words], and periods to precisely and squarely mark out the word order. And in preserving other figures of speech and of thought, great care must likewise be employed. Unless the translator preserves them all, he will crack and spoil completely the majesty of his original. But such preservation is impossible without great diligence and literary knowledge. The translator must understand the virtues, as it were, of the original composition and reproduce them correspondingly in his own tongue. There are two varieties of figures, figures of speech ('schemes') and figures of thought ('tropes'), both of which present difficulties to the translator. Those of speech, however, are more difficult than those of thought because they frequently consist in rhythmical effects, as when two phrases employ the same number of syllables, or when they are inverted or opposed in meaning, a figure the Greeks call 'antithesis'. For the corresponding Latin words often have either more or fewer syllables than the Greek, which makes it difficult to attain the same effect. Again, the darts which sometimes the orator throws strike with force only when they are discharged rhythmically; if they are feeble, lame or confused, they do little damage. The translator must study all these effects carefully and reproduce the rhythm to a nicety. And what of figures of thought, which light up one's

style and give it distinction? The best writers employ these as much as the other figures. Can a translator without disgrace be ignorant of them, omit them, or fail to give them in his translation their full majesty?

In order that what I have said about all these matters may be better understood, I should like to set out several examples to make it clear that it is not only the orators, but also the philosophers who employ these sorts of figures, and that, unless they are preserved in the translation, the majesty of their style is completely destroyed ...

The works of Plato and Aristotle are full of beauties and elegancies of this kind which would require a great deal of time to explicate in detail. To be sure, the reader will easily ascertain this for himself, if he possesses the erudition. By these examples it is abundantly clear that no one can preserve the majesty of the original unless he preserve its figures of speech and its rhythmical character. A loose and clumsy translation spoils immediately the whole reputation and influence of the original author. For this reason, it should be thought an inexcusable act of wickedness for a man who is not really learned or literary to attempt a translation.

Duarte (Edward, King of Portugal)

Duarte (1391-1438, reigned 1433-1438) was known as the philosopher-king; author of a famous legal treatise on 'The Loyal Counselor', he was a legal scholar whose land-grant reforms strengthened the Portugese monarchy.

Duarte (called King Edward in English) ascended to the throne upon the death of his father John I, at the age of 42. His interest in geographical exploration led him to back his brother Henry the Navigator in his expeditions to the West Coast of Africa; later, in 1437, he supported Henry in the disastrous invasion of Tangier, part of a plan to conquer Morocco. Duarte died shortly afterward of the plague.

Duarte's instructions on proper translation methods are closely related to those offered by Leonardo Bruni a few years earlier and by Etienne Dolet a century later; the 'job description' for the good translator has become by our time a classical genre of translation theory.

The Art of Translating From Latin

From *The Loyal Counselor (O Leal Conselheiro, 1430s)*

Translated by Maria J. Cirurgião

Whereas many who are lettered do not know how to translate well from Latin into our mother tongue, I

thought of writing these words of advice applicable towards that purpose.

First, to be well-acquainted with the meaning of the sentence to be translated and to render it entirely, neither changing, nor augmenting, nor diminishing in any way that which is written. Second, not to use latinized words, nor words from other tongues, but the whole to be written in our own vernacular, as near to the good usage of our speech as possible. Third, always to use words that are direct language, faithful to the Latin [text], and not to substitute one word for another; therefore, where the Latin states 'to glide' not to use 'to distance' and so on in other similar cases, deeming one [word] to be as good as another; for it is of great importance, for a good understanding, that these words be appropriately selected. Fourth, not to use words that, according to our habits of speech, are considered offensive. Fifth, that the same precepts be maintained which need be maintained when writing any other matter, namely, that the writing be wholesome, that it be clear and easily understandable, that it be as captivating as possible and concise to the extent possible. And, towards this end, the use of proper paragraphs and good punctuation is very advantageous. As to one person doing the mental work of rendering from Latin into the vernacular, and another person doing the writing, I am of the opinion that the whole is best done by one person.

William Caxton

As a translator and the first English printer, William Caxton (c. 1422-1491) exerted an enormous influence over later English literature.

Caxton was apprenticed to a mercer around the age of 16; when his master died three years later he moved to Bruges, where he was to live for the next 30 years, growing wealthy and powerful as a member of the English trading community in Holland and Flanders – of which community he was appointed 'governor' in 1463. In 1470 he stepped down from this post to enter the service of Margaret, duchess of Burgundy, most likely as her financial advisor.

It was in this period that Caxton increasingly became interested in literature, first as a translator, then as a printer. He began translating Raoul Le Fèvre's *Recueil des histoires de Troye* in 1469, but, finding that copying the book tired his hand and eye, he learned printing, and printed his finished translation of Le Fèvre, under the title *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, in 1475 – the first printed English book. The next year he published three other books before returning to England, where he continued to translate, write,