

## SELF-TRANSLATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

### OR: THE TRANSLATIONAL WORK LOST IN THE THEORY OF BILINGUALISM

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The word self-translation is furnished with a significant semantic ambiguity. Used as a concept within the register of philological terminology, self-translation denotes the process of translating one's own text into a different language than it was written in. But the word also implies the possibility to read it as translating the self, that is, transferring the self into another situation or condition. This potential dittology raises interesting questions: how do the interplay and interdependency between both processes function, and how are they conceptualized. Evidently, both meanings cannot be separated, for an author who translates his or her own text into another language is necessarily personally involved in a translational process. However, most of the existing theoretical approaches to self-translation tend to put emphasis on one of the two aspects, either on examining the relation between the original and the translated text with respect to their characteristics and differences, or on the subject position of the author and his or her relation to the cultures involved. It is as if the equivocality of self-translations functions epistemically as a kind of weighing scale that leans either to the one side or the other.

The more systematic study of self-translation in the humanities has for the most part emerged at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. If it was still reasonable during the 1990s to describe self-translation as somewhat 'neglected' by translation studies, this is no longer appropriate today.<sup>1</sup> As a prominent field of scholarship, the recently augmented attention to self-translation is obviously a somewhat belated response to the increasing phenomenon of bilingual authors or authors who do not write in their first language, but in the predominant language of the country where they live in exile or migration. Studying the characteristics or problems of self-translation as well as the varieties, possibilities

and limits of practicing it, the whole field is to date mostly a result of the cultural turn in translation studies. It has received its relevance and popularity in the wake of the theoretical approach of *cultural translation*, and today it is strongly influenced by concepts of post-colonial theory, especially by the idea of hybrid cultures, languages, and identities. The existing scholarship on self-translation consists of both an intense theoretical discourse and innumerable case studies, the latter situated nearly exclusively in the literary field and dominated by studies on famous authors of modernity such as Samuel Beckett (French-English), Vladimir Nabokov (Russian-English), and Karen Blixen alias Isak Dinesen (English-Danish), all three of whom are outstanding figures that regularly practiced self-translation; they are complemented by studies on Julien Green (French-English), Joseph Brodsky (Russian-English), Raymond Federman (French-English), and others, and more recently by articles on bi-lingual authors from non-European cultures, for example African or South-American authors and many Indian-American, Afro-American or other English-writing authors of a so-called hyphenated identity.<sup>2</sup> Self-translations by philosophers and scholars still play a marginal role in the whole field to date.

### **THE EMBLEMATIC FIGURE OF THE 'TRANSLATED MAN'**

Due to the cultural-theoretical background of the field's scholarly expansion, the current examination of self-translation is positioned at the intersection between the growing impact of multiculturalism, migration, and post-colonialism on the one hand and the institutionalization of translation studies as a discipline under the heading of 'translatology' on the other. 'In the late 1970s a new discipline was born: Translation Studies', as the publisher's preface to the third edition, from 2002, of Susan Bassnett's *Translation Studies* (1980) states.<sup>3</sup> This discipline received its main impulse from the aim to open the field of comparative literature in US-American academia to non-European cultures, as proclaimed paradigmatically in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (2003).<sup>4</sup> Its formation as an academic discipline is indicated by the publication of basic introductions or textbooks and several encyclopedias, for example the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2001), the *Handbook of Translation Studies* (2005, published by the Indian publishing house Atlantic), the *Encyclopedia of Literary Translations into English* (2000), and more recently the four volume *Handbook of Translation Studies* (2009–2013), to mention just a few.<sup>5</sup>

The precarious scholarly position of self-translation studies between the two aforementioned discourses yields a symptomatic contradiction. On one side there exists a tendency towards canonization typical of an academic discipline, on the other side there is an emphatic commitment to bilingualism at work which produces a certain terminological register; this is as much metaphorical as programmatic in that it formulates ideas

of an ideal position of hybridity. This contradiction has not sparked reflection, but rather the opposite: it lead to a metaphoric discourse of a somewhat idealized if not romantic version of self-translation. Therein, the so-called ‘translated man’ embodies an outstanding position invested with the faculty of a ‘double perspective’ or a ‘stereoscopic vision’ – as explicitly claimed for himself perhaps at first by Salman Rushdie in his novel *Shame* (1983), an ascription later repeated in the collection of essays *Imaginary Homeland* (1992) where he characterized the generation he belongs to and claims to represent as follows: ‘Having been born across the world, we are translated men.’<sup>6</sup> This title has turned into an emblematic figure of theoretical discourse. In an academic article on Rushdie with the programmatic title *Rushdie the translated man*, the Romanian scholar Dana Bădulescu writes:

‘Translation, like metaphor, is a journey. It is the territory covered by the journey, a space between here and there, neither here nor there. Moving in and out of language, culture, and place, or rather across them, the translated man comes into a space of hybridity, disjunctions, cleavages and fissures, which is *bridged over by translation and metaphor*. Rushdie’s condition of “translated man” implies *self-translation*. Any translated text is a mirror of the original text. Rushdie’s texts multiply mirrors, and the writer translates as much as he lets himself be translated by the languages he speaks.’<sup>7</sup>

Against the backdrop of ‘translation’ conceptualized as topos, self-translation functions obviously as an ideal solution to heal the wound of being separated from one’s own place, culture, and first language. Since the theoretical arguments of the article are based on the authority of Homi Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* (1994), it is important to be aware that there is a remarkable shift of emphasis in the way of dealing with theoretical ideas and rhetorical *topoi* ascribed to post-colonial theory. When Bhabha’s book put forward the concept of hybridity in the 1990s, it was engaged with the examination of ‘border lives’, described in terms of expulsion, disturbance of direction, and disorientation, ‘where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion’.<sup>8</sup> However, in the course of the enormous impact of this book and the global circulation of Bhabha’s theory under the heading of post-colonialism, the aspect of difference seemed to get more and more lost in a metaphorical understanding of translation, often discussed under the heading of ‘cultural translation’.

While in the beginning of the 1970s it was self-evident for George Steiner to discuss questions of exile and language under the title of *Extraterritorial*, thus emphasizing geographic-cultural displacement, the discourse has changed totally in the wake of globalization and the dominance of post-colonialism.<sup>9</sup> The idea of *migration* has replaced the concept of *exile* – often with a programmatic intention. In this way, the theory of

migration triggers the fading of one of the tasks of self-translation studies, namely to examine the very constellation of exile, of being expelled from one's country of birth, its language and culture, as the specific precondition that is different in each historical case. It has often been stated how difficult it is to make 'general statements on the matter' of self-translation because we have too few comparative studies at hand yet.<sup>10</sup> But the latter would have to include not only examinations of studies of the process and the product of self-translations and of comparisons with other (ordinary, or so-called second-hand) translations, but also concrete analyses of different kinds of migration as historically, culturally and politically specific and quite distinct preconditions of living and writing in another language, and the ensuing demand of self-translation.

The methodological alternative for studies of self-translation to refer to either the concept of exile or migration must be grounded in a historical analysis of the given situation of each single author-translator. It is not a mere theoretical question, it cannot be decided voluntarily, as the discourse of identity-politics assumes. To give an example of the latter, I quote once more from the article on *Rushdie the 'translated man'*:

'Since the 1980s some exiled postcolonial writers have reconfigured their identity by rejecting the status of exile and embracing that of migrant instead. [...] Moreover, they no longer write of their "displacement" as obsessively as the previous generation. The shift from exile to migrancy is indicative of these writers' significantly new perception of their own cultural location as interstitial and hybrid.'<sup>11</sup>

Since an exiled person, in most cases, has left his or her country involuntarily, whereas the concept of migration alludes to aspects of will, voluntariness, or decision ascribed to an autonomous subject position, it is obvious that the replacement of exile by migrancy functions as an act of empowerment for the individual writer concerned. As part of the process and politics of different modes of self-translation, it is therefore part of the object of research in self-translation study. The study of self-translations cannot just repeat this replacement. Thus, the idea of *migration* is not an innocent one within the theoretical discourse of self-translation.

## **SELF-TRANSLATION OF MINOR LITERATURES**

Self-translation – as any translation – is always involved in the politics of languages and in the hegemony of certain languages. In addition, *scholarship* on self-translation – as any concrete examination or case study in translation studies as well – is limited by the language skills of the individual scholar. The fact that to date a great part of the research literature deals with translations either *from* or *into* English is a symptom of the increasing tendency of English to function as the global idiom of both critical theory and

scholarship. One effect is that translation and self-translation studies not only repeat but even tend to augment the hegemonic role of English. Authors writing and translating in other languages appear quite seldom in the discourse of self-translation studies.<sup>12</sup> The literature of Yoko Tawada, for example, who writes both in Japanese and German and self-translates in both directions, could just as well be described as a ‘bilingual laborator[y]’ as the oeuvre of Samuel Beckett that occupies the position of a model for self-translation studies since decades.<sup>13</sup>

An often-cited, influential, and controversial article by the Scottish poet, translator, and critic Christopher Whyte, entitled *Against Self-Translation*, discusses the problem of linguistic hegemony from the view-point of a poet of ‘minor literature’, stating that ‘the practice of self-translation is never innocent’.<sup>14</sup> His article points out the implications of certain translation politics and their impact on the appreciation of self-translation. Probably due to the provocative title, the rhetorical gesture of which suggests a radical negation of self-translation, Whyte’s article is received amongst scholars as a fundamental questioning of, if not attack on, self-translation. However, his argument clearly runs quite differently. It emerges from the perspective of a ‘minor literature’ (Deleuze/Guattari) since he addresses the danger of marginalizing poetry written in a language of a small population – his example is Scottish Gaelic – by means of its self-translation into a hegemonic language, in his case English.<sup>15</sup> His whole argument is twofold, consisting of a poetic aspect and a cultural-political one. Referring to his own experience, he admits that translating his Gaelic poetry into English has always been done under duress: ‘It has never been done with either pleasure or satisfaction.’<sup>16</sup> For him, it is the very language of the poem that essentially constitutes poetry – he defines the poetic language as the content of poetry. This is the reason for his skepticism towards self-translation, since it is, as he puts it, ‘an activity without content, voided of all the rich echoes and interchanges I have so far attributed to the practice of translation. It is almost a question of voiding the poem of its content, which may, indeed, be the language in which it was written’.<sup>17</sup> The political part of his argument brings exile explicitly into play: ‘If translation is about crossing barriers, contaminating one language with the experience and the rhythms of another, self-translation occurs in situations of exile or of crude subjugation, where one language is attempting to take the place of another.’<sup>18</sup>

Whyte’s reflection explains why self-translation – as well as any translation – is called ‘not innocent’ from the viewpoint of minor literatures or languages that do not work on a global scale. Exile understood as a tension-filled constellation may demand a ‘critique of violence’ with respect to translation as well. When taking a closer look at actual examples of translation, including printing and publishing conditions, translation turns into a topography of languages where not only cultural differences come into play but where historical-political implications of the specific relation between the participating languages are acted out as well. This means that translation as a site where different languages interact cannot only be regarded as a bilingual laboratory, but has also to

be examined as a contact zone full of ‘highly asymmetrical relations of power’ or even as a battlefield, where cultural-political implications of the constellation at stake produce precarious relations.<sup>19</sup>

In Whyte’s article the political and the poetic aspects are brought together when he analyses the seemingly innocent print image of a publication as indicator of a hegemonic relation between the two languages involved. Here, he especially criticizes a bi-lingual publication of the Gaelic poet Sorley McLean (1911–1996), in which the English translation is printed on the right-hand side, the primary reading page of a book, with the original poem supplanted to the left page: ‘the author’s own English versions, like grimly haunting doubles from which his Gaelic poems no longer have any hope of being prised free, risks limiting and distorting the reception of his work’.<sup>20</sup>

### ON THE FADING OF SELF-TRANSLATION IN BILINGUALISM

Simultaneously to the substitution of exile by migration within self-translation scholarship, the paradigm of *bilingualism* has come to the fore. Although paradigmatic bilingual authors already played a central role in the initial phase of self-translation studies, a remarkable re-evaluation took place in the course of its propagation. In the beginning, there were no ‘translated men’ but *Alien Tongues*, as the telling title of Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour’s 1989 book on *Bilingual Russian Writers of the ‘First’ Emigration* runs. When previous scholarship often considered self-translation as a difficult task, sometimes even as a ‘self-inflicted torture’ that can best be avoided by the decision to write directly in the second language, as Beaujour wrote – in this way validating second-language authorship as a way out of the burden of self-translation – in recent scholarship the figure of the bilingual writer is, by contrast, the first and foremost subject; self-translation is used as a trope to describe the subject position of an author.<sup>21</sup> Whereas the current theoretical literature on self-translation values bilingualism as a profit or surplus, if not the *ne plus ultra* of cultural translation, former theories understood the task of the translator as an effort to cope with the problem of deficiency. Once more Beaujour: ‘Because self-translation and the (frequently) attendant reworking makes a text retrospectively *incomplete*, both versions become avatars of a hypothetical *total text* in which the versions in both languages would rejoin one another and be reconciled (as in the “pure” language evoked by Benjamin).’<sup>22</sup>

This depiction of self-translated texts as avatars of a hypothetical text is a seductive metaphor; however, a closer reading of the passage reveals a strong – frequently occurring – misunderstanding of Benjamin’s famous text *The task of the translator* (1921), indicated especially by the ideas of ‘incompleteness’ and ‘total text’. Both are concepts entirely alien to Benjamin’s theory of language. Whereas Beaujour’s diagnosis of a self-translated text as being incomplete is measured in relation to the idea of a complete, per-

fect translation, Benjamin considers any actual translation as a somehow 'provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages', which means that there will never be a total text at all, not even a hypothetical one.<sup>23</sup> He instead refers to the plurality of languages in history that produced a distance of all existing languages to revelation, so that 'what is meant' (*das Gemeinte*) is never to be encountered in relative autonomy but only concealed in the Babylonian variety of languages. And what Benjamin denotes with the term 'reine Sprache' refers not to purity; it does not mean 'pure language', but rather *mere* language, just language, nothing else.<sup>24</sup>

However, the opposite of understanding self-translation as a deficiency, namely the recent advancement of bilingualism into the position of a cultural role model, is as problematic as the deficiency-paradigm. In the theoretical framework of bilingualism, the two languages concerned become parties within an equilibrated constellation, with the effect that their distance and differences get leveled. In the view of bilingualism, writing in different languages turns into a choice or liberty; as a consequence, the translational work itself becomes irrelevant or marginalized. This tendency to underestimate the inequality and the specific historical, cultural, and epistemological implications of different languages is inherent in the identification of self-translation with bilingualism, even if it gets described as a more complex constellation, as can be studied in the rich research on Beckett. The Canadian author Paul St. Pierre in his reading of Beckett, for example, conceptualized bilingualism, as 'writing across languages', understanding this as a method to escape any single linguistic system, whereas Brian Fitch in his classical *Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work* entitled *Beckett and Babel* (1988) interpreted this approach as an attempt to bring 'two languages into a condition of *reciprocal interference* and interplay that has nothing to do with that mere contiguity of languages that obtains between translation and original'.<sup>25</sup> From this comment it is quite clear that also the 'writing across languages'-approach is based on an idea of two equivalent languages being involved, since this is the precondition of reciprocity.

Already the *bi* of bilingualism confines the epistemology of translation and self-translation in a dualistic terrain and evokes the notion of an equal disposal of both languages, with the problematic tendency to render the reflection on self-translation redundant. In this way the fate of the efforts of translation in the discourse of bilingualism shares that of world literature, as Erich Auerbach analysed in his famous article on *Philology and World Literature* (1952): the very moment world literature gets realized by means of the international distribution of literature the underlying process of standardization results in its sublation.<sup>26</sup> Something similar happens to the concept of self-translation, when against the horizon of bilingual authorship the question of translation suffers a setback. In the words of an influential representative of the field, Susan Bassnett, the argument against the concept of self-translation runs like this:

‘The term “self-translation” is problematic in several respects, but principally because it compels us to consider the problem of the existence of an *original*. The very definition of translation presupposes an original somewhere else, so when we talk about self-translation, the assumption is that there will be another *previously composed text* from which the *second text* can claim its origin. Yet many writers consider themselves as bilinguals and shift between languages, hence the binary notion of original-translation appears simplistic and unhelpful.’<sup>27</sup>

Although her critical intention is primarily directed against the concept of the ‘original’ that counts as the authentic text, this critique affects the concept of self-translation as such. When Bassnett wants to discard the original as a ‘previously composed text’, the difference between the first text and the second one – even more specifically: the difference between *writing* and *translating* – gets leveled. This sheds light once more on the tendency, inherent in the paradigm of bilingualism, to flatten the difference between two texts of different languages, which consequently relativizes the very work of translation in self-translation.

Yet, the idea of re-writing as an alternative understanding of self-translation has not developed exclusively within the discourse of bilingualism. The topoi of *re-writing*, *re-creation*, *re-enactment*, or *double writing process* have gained a prominent place in recent scholarship; they replace former descriptions of self-translation as a ‘second original’ or ‘new original’. In the entry on ‘Self-Translators’ in the *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English* (2000), Kristine J. Anderson summarizes the discussion as follows:

‘According to some theories, translations are meta-texts – texts that interpret and comment on the original text. *Normal translation*, however, is the result of a two-stage process of reading-writing, whereas self-translation is a *re-enactment* of the act of writing which produced the original text. In other words, ordinary translation is the *reproduction of a product*, whereas self-translation is the *repetition of a process*. As other writers on the topic have said, the self-translation is really a *re-writing*.’<sup>28</sup>

By way of re-conceptualizing self-translation as *re-writing* or *re-enactment*, a clear shift of attention from the product, the text, to the process, the translational work, takes place, putting emphasis on the creative character of translating. However, since Anderson’s argument unfolds by contrasting self-translation to so-called normal translation, the latter appears in a problematic light, when it is regarded as mere ‘reproduction of a product’. But should one not understand the work of so-called normal translation as a process as well?

This problem challenges the very translation theory that always provides, whether explicitly or implicitly, the horizon for investigating self-translation. One symptom of this challenge is the term ‘original’. It wanders like a spectre through the whole debate



on self-translation; its problematic epistemic position stems from theories of so-called normal translation. However, the notion of a translated text as the mere 'reproduction of a product', as well as the dualistic approach, clearly fall short of existing translation theories.

## THE REVERBERATION OF TRANSLATION

More sophisticated theories discuss the question of translation against the horizon of the plurality of languages. As Derrida argues in *Des Tours de Babel* (1985), translation theories reach their limits when they engage just with 'passing from one language to another and do not sufficiently consider the possibility for languages to be implicated *more than two* in a text. How is a text written in several languages at a time to be translated? How is the effect of plurality to be "rendered"? And what of translating with several languages at a time, will that be called translating?'<sup>29</sup>

However, plurality not only concerns the transferral between two different languages or 'several languages at a time', but already any single language itself. Since language is not a stable, unified, or homogeneous system – that is, not just a register of words and rules – each language has its origins and history, its own internal heterogeneity, and its *exophonic* elements within it.<sup>30</sup> It is not only that the particular grades of heterogeneity in different languages refer to their particular histories, but all constitutive elements of a certain language have their distinct 'historical index' as well. Theodor Adorno's essay on foreign words, entitled *On the Use of Foreign Words* (*Wörter aus der Fremde*, 1959), provides a convincing study of the symptomatic meaning of foreign words in the history of the German language in comparison with other languages: as for example French, which developed much more homogeneously, and the English language, in which the integration of its various origins (Germanic, Celtic, Latin et al.) and the formation of a common linguistic body took place much earlier. The development of German went quite differently. Due to the historically belated substitution of the socio-cultural duality of Latin and the vernacular by a homogeneous national language with a common grammar and vocabulary during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, accompanied by the invention of German equivalences for Latin words missing in the vernacular, a certain heterogeneity survived in this language. The conspicuousness of foreign words within a text that are not entirely assimilated into the 'German' vocabulary produces a phonetic tension and semantic difference that is a symptom of failed total unification and homogeneity. Precisely because of this lack, the German language possesses a certain plurality and variety that provides, according to Adorno, an advantage for any creative author, not just of poetry but also theory.<sup>31</sup>

In translation, the internal foreignness or otherness of each language meets the external foreignness between different languages. Due to the historical index of any

text, the process of translation always includes multiple translations: between different languages, times, cultures, registers, and idioms. In self-translation, in addition, the historic index of certain words and metaphors, of specific rhetoric and sounds blends with individual, biographic connotations – all of this resulting in a polyphonic reverberation of multiple connotations and references.

When Walter Benjamin considers translation as a somewhat ‘provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages’, it is the foreignness of languages that is at the center of his essay *The task of the translator* – and not ‘pure language’. And when he understands translation as testing the distance of the existing languages to revelation, that is, to a pre- or a-historical state of language, the foreignness of a certain language is a characteristic of its specific historical condition. Therefore, foreignness indicates not only difference, but distance in time as well. Benjamin supposes that ‘it is up to the translation that catches fire from the eternal life of works and the perpetually renewed life of languages to put ever anew the holy growth of the languages to the test: as far as what is hidden in them (*ihr Verborgenes*) is removed from revelation, how present it may become by the *knowledge of this remoteness*’.<sup>32</sup>

From this passage, it is clear that Benjamin understands translation as a way to engage with the historical condition of the very text to be translated. Evidently, he considers translation not as the ‘reproduction of a product’ but as a production of knowledge in itself. In Benjamin’s essay translation is not described in figures of transposing, substitution, exchange or interplay between two linguistic registers, but rather as a practice that illuminates the historicity of languages, and as a way of raising the sensibility and consciousness of the concealed meanings and connotations of its elements, because the latter become visible or audible when they are confronted with another language. The foreignness of the other language actualizes and unveils the internal otherness of the own language. Therefore, translation in Benjamin’s sense is quite contrary to the task of transposing the original into another language by assimilating the characteristics of the so-called ‘source language’ to those of the ‘target language’. Instead, he describes translation as a specific activation or awakening of certain elements of the original in the translational language, depending on the very place and situation of the translator. He describes translation in figures of echo and reverberation. In order to illuminate the tension-filled relation between language, the original, and translation, Benjamin sketches an intriguing constellation:

‘Translation, other than poetic literature (*Dichtung*), does not find itself inside the mountain forest of language itself, but outside of it, vis-à-vis of it, and without entering it, the translation calls in the original, from the only place where at a time the echo of one’s own language is able to produce the reverberation of the work in the foreign language.’<sup>33</sup>

Knowing that the echo is never a complete rendition of the 'original' and that the specific atmosphere of the surrounding resonates in its very sound, this image provides a realistic scenario of translation.

This constellation is conceptualized analogously to the theory of reading in Benjamin's essay *Literary History and Literary Studies* (1931) written a decade later, in which he formulates, under the heading 'microeon', a similar epistemological insight:

'What is at stake is not to portray literary works in the context of their age but to represent the age that perceives them – our age – in the age during which they arose. It is this that makes literature an organon of history [*Geschichte*], and to achieve this, and not to reduce literature to the material of historiography [*Historie*], is the task of the literary historian.'<sup>34</sup>

In analogy to Benjamin's reading principle – to view our own age in the age in which the works we read were produced – one can summarize the echo-principle of Benjamin's translation theory as follows: translation opens up a way to perceive the peculiarities of one's own language through the foreign language. In this way translation becomes an organon of the historic-cultural specificity of languages, by way of understanding the language of the translated text through that of the original. This is exactly what Benjamin meant when quoting Rudolf Pannwitz on the principle of good translations of ancient Greek texts, namely 'das deutsche zu [...] vergriechischen', to invest the German with Greek characteristics and not to Germanize the Greek.<sup>35</sup>

What are the consequences of this specific theory of translation for the question of self-translation? If the foreignness of languages is at the center of all translation theory, this applies to self-translation as well. And the variety of different approaches of self-translation is marked by their particular ways to treat foreignness. In this respect, self-translation requires a stronger and more intense awareness for the historical index of the two languages at stake. Since both texts are produced and authorized by the same person in his or her lifetime, there is – at least in most cases – a relatively small time difference between the work and its translation, so that the historicity of the language is not so much noticeable. Due to this concealed historicity, cultural difference advances as the dominant paradigm. On the other hand, self-translation brings with it the potential to address the foreignness of the own language because the detour across another language may open one's eye to its internal otherness and foreignness. Self-translation implies the chance to advance the sensibility for a symptomatic reading of single elements of the language that one often uses involuntarily, without being aware of their hidden inscriptions. In contrast, bilingualism – at least when understood as the capacity of equal access to both languages concerned – may produce the illusion of reciprocity. However, if the bilingual author feels fit to equally write in both languages, this circumstance demands an even greater awareness for existing differences and otherness, for the peculiar implicit

meanings and connotations, because they do remain and count for his or her audience, even if the bilingual author thinks he/she can master both.

It almost seems trite to mention that the principle of emphasizing the foreignness of languages in translation is the exact opposite to what the translation policy of English-speaking publishers demands from European and other non-native scholars if they want their works to be distributed on the globalized academic market, which is turning more and more into a monolingual one. Here, total assimilation to the contemporary Anglo-American idiom is expected as the norm, with the consequence that any foreign diction and all traces of the otherness of the original should be erased. However, this is not the only possible translation rule, as may be studied, for example, in many German translations of French theory: they in contrast strive to make the echo of the author's peculiarities in their specific use of the French language both audible and visible in the German version.

### **THE SPECTRE OF THE ORIGINAL**

Whereas the conceptual pairs of original-translation and author-translator are at the heart of translation theories, the object of investigation in self-translation theory is quite different, because here one actually has to deal with an author who is both writer and translator in one and the same person. Therefore, what is at stake here is the interplay between writing and translating, or re-writing, i.e. the relation between *writing* as a primary, creative process to express thought in words, to find formulations, to reject, erase and search other words and arguments on the one hand, and the *translational work* as a process of re-writing, working through, of adding modifications, supplementary expressions and commentaries, and of shortenings, condensations and the like, on the other hand. For this constellation, the concept of the 'original' does not play an equally central role as it does for 'ordinary' translation, since in the latter, only the original is vested with the authority of authorship. This hierarchy of authorship remains, even if the position of the translator recently has advanced to a kind of secondary authorship, according to certain copyright regulations that concede a percentage of the royalty instead of a fixed honorarium for the translational work. This legal and financial issue does not pertain to self-translation at all. So why does the spectre of the original nonetheless occupy such a prominent place in the discussion on self-translation?

The skepticism against the concept of originality may probably be explained by the fact that in translation studies the transposition of an original into another language is often based on the opposition of mother tongue and foreign language. Here, the attribute of foreignness is ascribed from the viewpoint of the original, although the reflection on problems and ways of translation takes place on the side of the translator for whom the author's language is the foreign one. Because of the priority of the author, translation

theory is engaged with issues such as the author's authority regarding the meaning of his or her text, the hierarchy of values, and the like. 'What is at stake here is the old notion of authority, of which the original authors traditionally have lots and translators none', as Rainier Grutman remarks, in an obviously critical tone, in an entry on *Auto-translation* in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*.<sup>36</sup> Many debates in translation theory are implicitly motivated by the attempt to liberate the translator from the shackles of mere dependence and to enhance the creative aspect of his work. This debate also seems to overshadow the topic of self-translation, although it is de facto not relevant in this field, which rather had to deal with the author's double-position of writer-translator. That the question of the original nonetheless seems to trouble self-translation studies a lot can only be understood as the symptom of an unsolved problem.

Studies that replace the concept of the original by the writer-translator paradigm, as for example Fitch's book on the bilingual Beckett, tend to consider the first written work and its auto-translation as mere 'variants'.<sup>37</sup> Here, again, the paradigm of bilingualism relativizes the difference between the two texts and replaces the conceptual pair of original-translation by the idea of just two versions of the same text. However, the analysis of the works of those self-translators, who (still) distinguish between their first and their second language, requires a consideration of the asymmetrical relation between both texts rather than referring to the conceptual couple of original-translation (regarded as secondary). At this point an additional interesting question is at stake, namely the question whether the first text is written in the first language and translated in the second or the other way round. This question is of enormous relevance. Even for persons who grew up entirely bilingual, there exist differences between both languages, determined by the certain personal, psychological and social cathexis of one and the other language during childhood. Despite all gender criticism against the term mother tongue, there exists a mother tongue for any individual because of the enormous role the voice of the mother plays already in prenatal development.

Obviously, the complexity of the self-translational constellation increases if a text was written in the foreign or second language of the author and afterwards translated into the first language. This practice is often mistakenly considered a kind of 'reverse-translation' (*Rückübersetzung*), an idea that implies the hypothetical existence of an invisible text to precede the text at first written in the second or foreign language. Here, the concept of original gets displaced in an inaccessible obscure inner realm where it leads a ghostly existence as a hypothetical pre-text, preceding any linguistic manifestation. In an analysis of self-translations (by Klaus Mann, Stefan Heym, Rudolf Arnheim and Hannah Arendt), Verena Jung argues against a common interpretation of self-translations as being simply 'freer, less literal translation[s]'<sup>38</sup> thus holding liberating creative potential. Instead, Jung assumes an 'inner language version of the English original that preceded the writing process'.<sup>39</sup> This category of an 'inner German' or an 'inner text' corresponds to the construction of pre-written, but already clearly shaped meanings,

thoughts and arguments that only need to get transposed in a verbal form – an idea that stems from an outdated linguistic approach to self-translation.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, any serious language theory since Saussure emphasizes the constitutive role of language for the formation of thoughts and the expression of ideas. In Hannah Arendt's *Denktagebuch*, one comes across an entry of April 1970, entitled 'On the difficulties I have with my English readers'. Herein Arendt reflects on her experiences with the English-speaking public and discovers the problem she has to confront in this case in an attitude towards language that she calls a 'thesaurus-philosophy', that is 'the notion that words "express" ideas which I supposedly have prior to having the words'. Arendt, in contrast, doubts 'that we would have any "ideas" without language'.<sup>41</sup>

When self-translation studies presume the existence of meaning already completed in a prewritten state, this motivates and legitimizes the goal of reconstructing a so-called inner pre-text, to make an inner invisible text visible and readable: 'An author who edits his own text during the translation process by using his pre-text as a basis allows the pretext to resurface during the translation process', Jung argues.<sup>42</sup> In this way, the so-called inner German text, identical neither with the written English text nor with the translated German version, attains the position of the 'true original'.<sup>43</sup> Through this construction, the text written originally in the second language becomes displaced into a secondary state, a sort of derived original. Based on the notion of a lasting and seemingly eternally fixed hierarchy of mother tongue and foreign language, any text written in the second language thus becomes a sort of distorted original. It may, as it were, be healed when – through the detour of a self-translation into the author's first language – the 'disfigured original' gets in this way repatriated to the 'true' original that always already existed in a dormant, pre-verbal state, awakened through the analysis of the scholar.

In contrast to such a construction, I suggest to take the *belatedness* of the self-translation seriously and to use it as the point of departure for an alternative theory of self-translation. Referring to the description of the dream as a 'translation without an original' in psychoanalysis, one could consider writing in a second language as a *translation without original* – that is to say, as writing literally in an *other* language.<sup>44</sup> There, the author can never be completely sure of acting as the master in the house of meaning/language; there, the author can never be entirely sure of actually saying what he/she wishes to express – at least less so than in the first language. In contrast to the psychological insult to the self, diagnosed by Sigmund Freud in 1917, that the 'ego is not the master in its own house', the uncertainty that comes with writing in a foreign language is not caused by one's own unconscious.<sup>45</sup> It instead comes from a *linguistic unconscious*, namely from a limited familiarity with the ambiguity and nuances, with the sub-tones and overtones of certain words, expressions, and sayings in the foreign language. The subsequent self-translation into one's first language can thus not only be understood as re-writing, but as a process of *working-through* as well: working through the words, the concepts and metaphors, the arguments, examples and explanations.

This process might well be described by analogy with the Freudian procedure of ‘remembering, repeating and working-through’.<sup>46</sup> When remembrance in this case concerns the question of ‘what was it that I wanted to express’, it receives its colour and illumination not from the past writing situation itself but from the current desire of expression that casts light on the former, as happens in the therapeutic remembrance in psychoanalysis. Thus, the current situation of the author-translator – the now (*Jetztzeit*) of translation – sheds light on the preceding writing procedure of the author-writer. The differences to occur between, for example, an English written text and the German self-translation can thus for example be understood as symptoms of partially unclear and unsolved questions within the first edition.

The aim in this case, however, is not to reconstruct a previous text (or experience or affect) but to overwrite a text written in a foreign language with a text worked-through in the first language. The result of this repeated working-through that always accompanies self-translation should by no means be confused with a supposed pre-existing original – rather, it is a belated text that repeats, reworks, *and* comments on the meaning of the first, written in the foreign language. Authors who are accustomed to practicing self-translation, as a working-through after the first publication of a book written in the second language, are able to profit from a kind of ongoing rewriting in order to differentiate, explain and specify certain aspects and meanings.<sup>47</sup>

