

**POIRIER, Éric (2019): *Initiation à la traduction professionnelle: Concepts clés*. Montréal: Linguattech, 245 p.**

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# DOCUMENTATION

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## Comptes rendus

POIRIER, Éric (2019): *Initiation à la traduction professionnelle: Concepts clés*. Montréal: Lingua-tech, 245 p.

As the subtitle suggests, this book is mainly about concepts which the author thinks future professional translators should know.<sup>1</sup> It provides ideas about language in general and French in particular which instructors at translation schools could usefully consider when preparing courses.

Chapter 1 covers the translation-related professions and translators' associations in Canada, as well as term banks, areas of specialization, and the competencies required of translators. A good chunk of the chapter is devoted to detailed instructions for querying the two main Canadian banks, *Termium*<sup>2</sup> and the *Grand dictionnaire terminologique*,<sup>3</sup> with five pages of related exercises at the end of the chapter, and for some reason eight pages listing the fields and subfields of the two banks (Appendices I to III). I found the discussion of terminology hard to follow in places (p. 42). The biographical sketch on the back cover reveals that digital applications for pedagogical purposes are Poirier's special area of interest, though curiously he has nothing to say about translation memories.

In discussing competencies, Poirier mentions that "knowledge about translation" includes knowledge of the metalanguage of translation. To this end, he discusses 127 "key concepts," each defined in a box at relevant locations.<sup>4</sup> Readers may wonder how many *non*-key, secondary concepts there might be!

Several concepts did not strike me as terribly important, for example the notion of an *interlanguage* as a way of representing meaning, especially in rule-based machine translation (MT) (p. 73). Rule-based MT is not used much now, and besides, the author says (p. 29) that MT is "accessoire" in professional translation: it plays an auxiliary or perhaps incidental role. Among the concepts I did find of interest: 1) hypertraduction—a tendency by some into-French translators to avoid borrowings from English that have become well integrated into French; 2) langue-culture—different cultures are expressed in French, and this has created a conflict between Canadian French and what is sometimes called "Parisian French"<sup>5</sup>—a conflict which those of us who translate into Canadian English do

not face; and 3) paronymes—when these near-homonyms are in the (less well known) source language, the translator can easily err: Poirier gives the example of a translator who rendered *winding streets* by rues balayées par le vent [windy streets] (p. 92).

Chapter 2 is about meaning. It tends to the abstract: the first example doesn't appear until the thirteenth page. The level of detail will not be of interest to most members of the "vaste public" mentioned on the back cover as the intended readership. Does a translation critic or a user of translations, or indeed a professional translator, really need to know about semiotics and the linguistic sign as described by Saussure (p. 67-72)?

The chapter starts with the concept of acceptation—one of the senses listed in a dictionary entry. Poirier mentions (p. 77-78) that, barring neologism, translators must not choose word senses that are not found in a dictionary. I would point out that this applies only to the target language: stretching dictionary senses of target language words is not acceptable when translating pragmatic texts (with which the book is wholly concerned), but translators do need to be able to recognize such non-dictionary usages in the source text.

There is an interesting but perhaps too lengthy section (eight pages) distinguishing sens from signification, the former being a property of discourse units (sentence, paragraph, text, and corpus), the latter a property of language system units (morpheme, word, phrase, and clause). Poirier points to an interesting difference between interpretation and translation with respect to sens: interpreters must speak in the target language immediately after the source is spoken, but translators must take the time to adjudicate among several possible meanings and attempt to discern what readers are likely to take from their translations (p. 80-81).

Synonymy, polysemy, and homonymy are discussed in considerable detail (p. 81-93). Poirier takes the view that synonymy can apply not just intralingually but also interlingually, and not just to signification but also to sens (where it is usually called *paraphrase* in intralingual rewording). His example of the latter is translating *help pay the rent* as réussir à joindre les deux bouts, where there are no interlingual synonyms at the level of signification. He emphasizes the need for translators to consider several synonyms rather than always selecting the same one: perhaps *misfortune* should not be translated by malheur but by some

other word (he lists *infortune*, *adversité*, *revers*, *écheç*, and eleven other words, pointing out that there are many more equivalents than are found in a bilingual dictionary). I would note in passing that it is common for there to be an interlingual synonym of a word that is closer in meaning to that word than any intralingual synonym (*frequently* is more formal than *often*, but *souvent* and *often* are at a comparable level of formality).

In discussing polysemy, Poirier points out that sometimes a translator will reduce textual polysemy (writing *agent secret* or *agent d'assurance* or *agent intelligent* instead of just *agent*) and sometimes increase it (writing *actifs* in an accounting text instead of *actifs immobilisés corporels* for *tangible fixed assets*), once the longer expression has been introduced.

Poirier uses the term *homonymie* not just for cases where a word has two *significations* that are unrelated in meaning (*bank* of a river and *bank*, the financial institution, which get separate dictionary entries) but also for cases where the different *significations* of a word are related and in a single entry. This may at first seem odd, but perhaps it makes sense in translation, since two related *significations* of a polysemous word in the source language may not have a single identically polysemous equivalent in the target language, as is found with “false friends” (which Poirier sees as special cases of interlinguistic homonymy); for example, French-to-English translators often wrongly pick English *important* for French *important* when they should pick *big*.

Chapter 3 is about units from the corpus down to the word. Poirier has much of interest to say about corpus, text, and genre (p. 102-110). The ensuing 35-page discussion of sentence types and word classes sometimes reads as a sort of comparative grammar of English and French, but on several pages, one has the impression of reading a French grammar book, often a rather elementary one (p. 122, the reader is informed that interrogative sentences are used to ask a question and that they end with a question mark). The grammar discussion includes eight pages on the concept *mot*; this seemed more suited to a linguistics course than an introduction to professional translation.

The chapter concludes with the role of context, which includes the co-text (text accompanying a wording being translated, whether nearby or further away) and extratextual context. The latter includes both “cognitive context,” defined in terms of situational knowledge and emotions evoked by the text, and “pragmatics,” defined in terms of situation-related language conventions. Confusingly, Poirier also uses *situation* to refer to the conditions in which a translation is produced and functions (role of clients, final readers, and

employers). Interestingly, he advocates a teaching method that minimizes reference to translators’ working conditions (p. 146-147). This section of the chapter is very abstract (there are hardly any textual examples or scenarios) and too many concepts are crammed into its eight pages.

Chapter 4, about quality control, is mainly a catalogue of translation errors. Oddly, Poirier rightly starts by saying that accuracy is the most important quality of a professional translation of a pragmatic text, but he devotes only two pages to this matter, followed by almost 40 pages about errors in the target language, some due to interference from the source language or the wording of the source text, but others due to faulty knowledge of written French. The emphasis on the latter problem (not found in textbooks for into-English translation) is due to the historic role translation has played in establishing norms for written French in Quebec. One result is a need to constantly consult reference documents about language (p. 208-211).

A knowledge of error types is certainly necessary for translation students when self-revising (though perhaps not the numerous small distinctions Poirier makes). More important, however, is mastery of techniques for spotting possible errors and principles for deciding whether a change is really needed. Aside from the valuable advice to read a sentence of the translation first when making a comparison with the source text (p. 169), and to leave time between drafting a translation and self-revising it (p. 107), there is no discussion of revision techniques. The author says (p. 164) that such methodological matters will be dealt with in another book,<sup>6</sup> though on page 1 he writes that the present book is based on some of the notes from his methodology course at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. He does give advice on matters such as how to translate English passive sentences, but there is very little about procedures for translating (on p. 115, he does mention in passing that it is often a good idea to translate the title of a section after translating the section).

The book contains some factual errors:

On page 20, the author says that the *Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes du Québec*<sup>7</sup> requires a BA or MA in translation in order to become a Certified Translator, but this is in fact just one way of qualifying: a candidate can also provide evidence of experience as a translator, professor or language services manager.

On page 66, Poirier mentions the French distinction between one sense of the word *langue* (a system of communication used by a social group, such as Zulu or Japanese) and one sense of *langage* (the human faculty of language), but he wrongly claims that English also makes this useful distinction: *tongue* versus *language*. In fact, English relies

on *langue* for both concepts, distinguishing the intended meaning by context (“the Russian language”/“the gift of language”). *Tongue* is used in the set phrase “mother tongue” but it is now only rarely used in the sense of French *langue* (“the Russian tongue”); otherwise it means oral expression (“Hold your tongue!”).<sup>8</sup>

On pages 162-163, Poirier states that he was unable to consult the international translation standard *ISO 17100*<sup>9</sup> and its European predecessor *EN 15038* because they are very expensive. Unfortunately, he wrongly assumes that they concern only the steps involved in providing translation service and do not provide quality criteria for the finished product, whereas in fact they do (Section 5.4.1 of *EN 15038*<sup>10</sup> and Section 5.3.1 of *ISO 17100*), as does the unmentioned Canadian standard *CAN/CGSB-131.10: 2017*<sup>11</sup> in Section 8.4.3.

Finally, there are several proofreading problems. For example, “Modèle du groupe PACTE” is listed on page 238 as a key concept to be found on page 51, but the discussion of the PACTE model of translator competence is on page 49 (and a boxed definition is missing). The URL given for Canada’s *National Occupational Classification*<sup>12</sup> (p. 26) does not exist and the date of the most recent version is 2016, not 2006.

To conclude, the book struck me as perhaps mostly of interest to Canadian English-to-French translation instructors rather than their students. Also, a bit more structural editing—to redistribute information within and across the chapters—would have made the book clearer. That said, intriguing ideas that will be of interest to many kinds of readers do appear throughout the book.

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#### NOTES

1. The book has only a little to say about the translation profession. The author distinguishes professional translation from translation which is a language-learning exercise and from machine translation (p. 27-29) as well as from translation by amateurs or beginners (p. 1). For a book that deals with the profession (from a European perspective), see Daniel Gouadec’s *Translation as a Profession* (2007), based in part on his *Profession: Traducteur* (2002).
2. *Termium Plus*: Public Works and Government Services Canada. Consulted on 1 May 2020, <<https://www.tb.termiumplus.gc.ca>>.
3. *Le grand dictionnaire terminologique*: Office québécois de la langue française. Consulted on 2 May 2020, <<http://gdt.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca>>.
4. Several definitions are borrowed from others (with due credit), in particular Jean Delisle and Marco Fiola’s coursebook *La traduction raisonnée* (1993/2013).
5. Poirier refers to the language of Paris as just one among many French *langues-cultures* (p. 16).
6. That is perhaps why the chapter’s recommended readings do not include Paul Horguelin and Michelle Pharand’s *Pratique de la révision* (2009), though it is listed at the very end in the publisher’s full catalogue.
7. *Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes du Québec*: Consulted on 29 April 2020, <<https://ottiaq.org>>.
8. In *Foundations for a Science of Language* (Guillaume 1984)—the English translation of selected writings of French linguist Gustave Guillaume (1883-1960)—the word *tongue* is used to translate Guillaume’s *langue* (and English *language* is used for French *langage*). This very odd use of *tongue*, with no preceding article or possessive pronoun—“[...] compile a dictionary of the words contained in tongue [...]” (Guillaume 1984: 90)—was selected by the translators to emphasize the difference between Guillaume’s concept of the linguistic system and Saussure’s concept *langue* (Guillaume 1984: XX). Guillaume’s *psychomécanique du langage* is still taught at Laval University in Quebec City. Perhaps Poirier is familiar with the use of *tongue* in the Guillaume translation. Thanks to Douglas Rideout for pointing this out.
9. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STANDARDIZATION (May 2015): *ISO 17100:2015. Translation services - Requirements for translation services. ICS*. Consulted on 28 April 2020, <<https://www.iso.org/standard/59149.html>>.
10. DEUTSCHES INSTITUT FÜR NORMUNG (August 2006): *DIN EN 15038:2006-08. Translation services - Service requirements. DIN*. Consulted on 28 April 2020, <[https://www.password-europe.com/images/PWE/PDF/DIN\\_EN15038.pdf](https://www.password-europe.com/images/PWE/PDF/DIN_EN15038.pdf)>.
11. CANADIAN GENERAL STANDARDS BOARD (1 March 2017): *CAN/CGSB-131.10-2017 - Translation services*. CGSB. Consulted on 30 April 2020, <<https://www.scc.ca/en/standardsdb/standards/28935>>.
12. EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CANADA (Last update of website: 17 December 2019): *National Occupational Classification*. Consulted on 3 May 2020, <<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/noc.html>>.

#### APPENDIX

##### Translation manuals

DELISLE, Jean et FIOLA, Marco (1993/2013): *La traduction raisonnée: Manuel d’initiation à la traduction professionnelle de l’anglais vers le français*. 3<sup>e</sup> éd. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

GOUADEC, Daniel (2002): *Profession: Traducteur*. Paris: La Maison du dictionnaire.

- GOUADEC, Daniel (2007): *Translation as a Profession*. Amsterdam/Philadelphie: John Benjamins.
- GUILLEAUME, Gustave (1984): *Foundations for a Science of Language*. (Translated from French by Walter HIRTLE and John HEWSON) Amsterdam/Philadelphie: John Benjamins.
- HORGUELIN, Paul A. and PHARAND, Michelle (2009): *Pratique de la révision*. Montréal: Linguattech.

LUTHER, Martin (2017): *Écrits sur la traduction*. (Édité et traduit par Catherine A. BOCQUET) Traductologiques. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 192 p.

On se représente souvent la Renaissance comme un âge idyllique peuplé de barbus vénérables, qui œuvrent au développement des savoirs scientifiques, des spéculations philosophiques et surtout des arts: une période de retour aux sagesse et aux formes de l'Antiquité, de début de séparation entre ce qu'il est commun d'appeler le spirituel et le temporel. C'est une partie de la réalité. Mais ce fut aussi un temps d'extrême violence, en particulier à partir de la fin du xv<sup>e</sup> siècle. Que l'on pense à la colonisation des Amériques par les Espagnols, aux guerres d'Italie ou à la Guerre des paysans en Allemagne: une succession de bains de sang. Et cela avant même que n'éclatent les Guerres de religion proprement dites. On en trouve par exemple la trace dans *L'œuvre au noir* (1968)<sup>1</sup> de Marguerite Yourcenar, dans les écrits de Machiavel<sup>2</sup>, ou de Giono (1963, en particulier)<sup>3</sup>. Mais aussi dans ceux de Martin Luther, figure majeure et, disons-le, fondatrice, du protestantisme. Lui-même, d'ailleurs, le revendiquait: «Je suis né pour guerroyer contre les groupes séditieux et les diables et pour être en campagne. C'est pourquoi mes livres sont si impétueux et si belliqueux» (p. 30). C'est la première impression qui se dégage de la publication, dans la collection «Traductologiques» des Belles Lettres, des *Écrits sur la traduction* de Martin Luther, édités, traduits et présentés par Catherine A. Bocquet.

Il faut se réjouir d'une telle publication: la traduction en allemand de la Bible par Luther, même si, c'est rappelé ici, elle n'est pas la première, marque une rupture dans la culture occidentale, et les polémiques engendrées par cette œuvre, outre qu'elles eurent un rôle conséquent dans la naissance du protestantisme, résonnent encore dans la traductologie au xxi<sup>e</sup> siècle. Il est donc très précieux d'avoir accès, en français, à l'intégralité des justifications publiées par Luther lui-même lors de ces polémiques, avec, en outre, l'allemand (de l'époque) en vis-à-vis.

La préface de Michel Grandjean se charge avant tout de la présentation historico-théologique, laissant à l'introduction de Catherine Bocquet

la mise en perspective traductologique, et l'on observe un certain nombre de recouvrements entre ces deux avant-textes, ainsi qu'avec le riche corpus de notes et (heureusement...) la traduction proprement dite. Au-delà, le texte se compose principalement de trois lettres d'inégale longueur rédigées et publiées par Martin Luther entre 1530 et 1533 (p. 63-154). Il faut y ajouter une annexe fort bien faite sur les principaux personnages mentionnés dans la «Lettre ouverte sur l'art de traduire et sur l'intercession des saints», qui forme le cœur de l'ouvrage (p. 155-178), ainsi qu'une bibliographie.

Ce travail ambitieux et nécessaire soulève évidemment un certain nombre de questions qui sont à la fois historiques, religieuses et traductologiques. Et qui peuvent donner une sensation de vertige: nous sommes après tout face à la traduction française accompagnée d'un commentaire sur une traduction allemande qui eut la particularité, à son époque, d'ajouter une dimension supplémentaire à ce que l'on est tenté d'appeler un original (la Vulgate) tout en revenant souvent au texte hébreu pour remettre en cause le statut même de cet original (voir en particulier p. 12). On pense ici à Meschonnic (2002, notamment) ou au concept de manipulation, dû à Theo Hermans (1985, notamment), qui est d'ailleurs un des rares auteurs qui manquent à la bibliographie. Au point que l'on hésite au moment de tenter cette recension: qui commente quoi, au juste? Et est-il vraiment raisonnable d'ajouter encore une couche, certes modeste, à ce séculaire empilement?

Il convient, je pense, d'envisager cette publication sur deux plans: il y a, d'un côté, les idées que Luther y développe sur la traduction et, de l'autre, la façon dont ces idées sont mises à la portée du lecteur francophone d'aujourd'hui.

A-t-on, tout d'abord, affaire, dans ces textes, à une œuvre proprement traductologique? La réponse de Catherine Bocquet, dans son introduction, est indubitablement positive. Et, de fait, on trouve chez Luther maints échos de cet ordre, relevés ou pas:

1) à Jérôme:

à l'inverse, il est des passages où notre traduction calque les mots du texte original, alors que nous aurions fort bien pu en donner une version différente et plus explicite: c'est que ces mots-là avaient une valeur singulière [...] (p. 137)

2) à Dolet, contemporain de Luther, qui aurait pu reprendre à son compte les *cinq règles de la traduction*

3) à Nida et Taber:

Car ce n'est pas aux mots du texte latin, comme le font ces ânes, qu'il faut demander