Stolze, Radegundis (2015). *Hermeneutische Übersetzungskompetenz. Grundlagen und Didaktik.* **Berlin: Frank & Timme, 395 pp.**

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Hermeneutics as a foundational orientation in the critical reception of texts has not featured greatly in Translation Studies (TS) since this comparatively young discipline was established after WW2 in universities and specialized schools throughout Europe. This is the more surprising as the mythological origin of the term hermeneutics, the messenger Hermes sent by the gods to the people on earth, points to the process of translation in the double sense of delivering and interpreting a message composed in a language unknown to the audience. As early as the classical period in Greek philosophy, the relationship between language and meaning (Aristotle, Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας *Peri hermeneias*) was given the name hermeneutics. Not surprisingly, it has a venerable history in western thought. Its original concern being the translation of the intended meaning of a divine message, it provided the basis for early Christian theology to establish the true doctrine of the church (Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*). Originally then, hermeneutics served the normative aims of Christian teaching. This seems to be a long way from the concern of today's translation theory and practice. It's worth remembering, however, that the first systematic as well as most influential theoretical text on translation in Germany was written by Friedrich Schleiermacher, a professor of Protestant theology in Berlin. Even though hermeneutics played and is still playing a significant role in legal studies, it was Protestant theology in the 19th century that paved the way for its importance in the emerging humanities. One of the reasons for the influence of hermeneutics was the fact that it was not only concerned with the "true" understanding of the Biblical texts, i.e. their interpretation and application, but just as much with the methodological issues involved in establishing the meaning of texts. Hermeneutics turned into an early kind of semantic interpretation.

This could be regarded as the point where hermeneutics and modern TS meet, or rather should have met. However, the establishment of academic translation studies in post-WW2 Europe, especially in Germany, largely went a different direction. The result was a predominantly linguistic, more science-oriented discipline. The older discourse on translation, which could roughly be classified as hermeneutical, remained in the background of academic translation research, even though a non-linguistic book like Steiner's *After Babel* became a classic. In western Germany Radegundis Stolze's teacher, Fritz Paepcke remained the notable exception, and today it can be said without exaggeration that Stolze is the leading exponent of hermeneutic translation studies, the book in question being the latest of several publications by Stolze on translation theory and hermeneutics.

What can hermeneutics contribute to translation – not only to the theory of translation, but also to its practice? This is the basic issue, which Stolze discusses in her book on 'hermeneutic competence in translation'. Even though the term "competence" points the reader to the didactic aspects of her book, Stolze's main topic is the role of understanding, not only because it is one of the fundamental issues of hermeneutics and the philosophy of language, but more so because it is the first step in the process of translation. As a matter of fact, Stolze argues, understanding comes first in any kind of communication, be it oral or textual. Yet this rather obvious fact has not been a topic in TS. Her inquiry, therefore, is not directed towards empirical research into cognition but towards the factors and behaviours that lead to understanding.

Stolze traces an increasing awareness in the history of hermeneutics, which she discusses in chapters 3 and 4, that every understanding (including that of the translator, of course) involves the "understander" i.e. preconceptions as well as personal and social conditionings. Every act of understanding bridges the inevitable gap between its object and the understander thanks to the language that gives expression to the perceived meaning. This may sound as though any act of subjective interpretation was justified, a criticism frequently aimed at hermeneutics. However, in terms of translation, Stolze argues, recognition of the productive role of the individual does not lead translators into the trap of mere subjectivity, because every phase of understanding that precedes the actual translation process is tied to the demands of the source text (ST) material.

In view of the demands that translation should be "scientific" Stolze stresses repeatedly that understanding is the keyword of the hermeneutical approach to translation. Understanding comes first, translating follows. What she calls areas of orientation for the translator, i.e. context, discourse conventions, terminology, modes of expression (style), rhetorical orientation – all these are linked to and based on acts of individual reading, i.e. understanding (p. 326). As translators check every step of orientation against their understanding they move in a hermeneutical spiral towards a specifically individual result of the cultural and linguistic reconstruction of the ST.

Unlike linguistically oriented introductions to translation, Stolze points out that ST and TT meet in a kind of dialogue in the translator's mind (p. 201), and, one might add, even before the writing process has begun. This is usually ignored in linguistic translation studies, which emphasize the linear, rule-oriented method of translation. Stolze repeatedly refers to Wilss' influential publications in Germany, but other publications follow similar paths in their endeavour to be as methodically strict as possible. Stolze's hermeneutics-based approach agrees much more with cognitive studies that support the notion of an interaction between logical procedure and intuition. She leaves no doubt that translators require sufficient knowledge in the subject matter area of a ST, that they need to recognize the relevant terms and notions within the text, but this is not sufficient to describe how a translation is finally achieved. In this regard one of the core sentences in Stolze's book is: "Übersetzungskompetenz ist ein

wissensbasiertes Handeln mit Intuition" (p. 215, 'Translation competence is intuitive knowledge-based action.'[my transl.])

Stolze attributes to intuition a decisive role not only in the process of understanding but also in finding the appropriate words in the translation. Cognitive understanding and verbal expression interact in a kind of spiral ascent till the translator finds a result that (s)he regards as satisfactory. Stolze uses the term *autopoeisis* for this process (p. 202 f.) in which cognition attracts language in the mind of the translator or, to paraphrase Heidegger, words attach themselves to meanings (cf. p. 203). This is a far cry from the notion of equivalences familiar in contrastive linguistics.

Most translation teaching so far has focussed on the aim of finding equivalent expressions of SL material in the TL. Equivalence was thought to be the result of lexical and syntactical transfer, following specific rules. Even though the differences of language systems can often be overcome on the linguistic level, i.e. the meaning of texts can be expressed by equivalent linguistic features, such an approach is limited by the cultural differences involved. Linguistic equivalence as such cannot help construct cultural identity in the TT (cf. p. 333 f.) In this regard it is worth mentioning what Stolze regards as an indispensable attribute of translation competence: cultural memory.

Stolze takes up terms and notions, which recent TS has more or less shunned, e.g. linguistic intuition, creativity, linguistic empathy, holistic method (p. 219 f.) and credits them with an important function even though these concepts are difficult to pinpoint precisely. Yet, they allow her to link the hermeneutical approach with more recent system-theoretical ideas like Maturana's theory of biological systems. Such a system consists of connections that may be invisible, hardly traceable or identifiable (p. 221), but nevertheless their interaction is essential. Similarly, the intuitive processes leading to successful translation may be regarded as impossible to define or trace even though they take place in the mind of every translator.

The decisive difference between the hermeneutical approach to translation and other models of the translation process, e.g. the functionalist model is the notion of a hierarchical methodology (e.g. starting with the question: What is the purpose or *skopos* of a translation?) Stolze insists that every text represents an individual case with an individual hierarchy of characteristic features connected in a specific way, and for this reason every translation depends on the individual response of the translator. The hermeneutical approach, while certainly not excluding systemic criteria rather chooses a holistic point of view, moving from the vertical to the horizontal level. Stolze provides example analyses of the translational and linguistic relevance of such a holistic approach (e.g. Ch. 14.2) including alternative translations of her own.

To summarize, Stolze envisages hermeneutic translators aided by all the linguistic and technological means and tools available, but freed from serving either technological requirements or a prescribed procedure, ready to start their intuition-based reconstruction of the perceived meaning in the TT (p. 339). In terms of procedure this means that the hermeneutic translator looks at the whole of a text, its embeddedness

in the broadest sense, before proceeding to its specific features. The competences demanded of the translator are many-facetted, including historical and cultural awareness, intercultural competence, linguistic and communicative competence, specialized knowledge, terminology, textual competence, research and tools competence, and not least social and life-long learning competences. Underlying all of these competences is the ethical responsibility of translators and their empathy towards the contents of the ST. Stolze's demand for a hermeneutic approach to translation means nothing less than "up-grading" the translators' achievements.