

## SEMIOTICS AND THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION

Dinda L. Gorrée, *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation: with special reference to the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce*, 243 pp. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1993.<sup>1</sup>

This book is such a landmark in the history of translation theory, that the reviewer's spontaneous reaction would be to praise it unreservedly. However, the reviewer's job is to play the Devil's advocate, and this shall now be done.

A first noticeable defect of the book is its absence of organisation. This objection is forestalled by the author herself, who warns the reader that this is rather a collection of essays than a book. It is true that the fact of there being a central idea: that translation is or should be "semiosis" in the Peircean sense of the term, renders this objection less forceful than it might otherwise have been, the different chapters all tending in the main to support this idea.

Nevertheless the essay form does appear to promote and perpetuate certain inconsistencies or even contradictions, which might have been ironed out if the work had been presented in another way.

For instance the author is at pains to point out: 1. that she does not take the linguistic sign as her point of departure, and 2. that Peirce's triadic system cannot be reduced to a dyadic one, and that she rejects Jakobson's efforts to force Peirce "into a structuralist straightjacket", but a considerable part of the book is devoted to forcing Jakobson into the Procrustean bed (which is much too big for him) of Peirce. For instance: the attempt to state in Peircean terms the three types of translation distinguished by Jakobson. To say that:

Intersemiotic translation = Firstness (with most "informational loss")  
Interlingual translation = Secondness (with some informational loss)  
Intralingual translation = Thirdness (with minimal informational loss)

might superficially appear to be valid, but the conclusion of this passage (p. 161) which states that "it is therefore intralingual translation, with its emphasis on the Thirdness of genuine semiosis, that the sign's meaning-potentialities are most accurately and fully explored and realized", will hardly satisfy the reader whose preoccupation is with the signification of the text.

If translation were considered merely as a means of conveying "information", this might possibly be true (although it is not quite clear what is meant by "information"); however it is noticeable that the author herself changes her terminology in the conclusion just quoted, when she talks of the sign's "meaning-potentialities" and I

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<sup>1</sup> The principal chapterheadings are as follows: Fundamentals of the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce; Translation and the semiotics of games and decisions; Wittgenstein, translation, and semiotics; Peirce and the problem of translation: soul and body; Identity vs. difference: Benjamin and Peirce; Translation after Jakobson after Peirce; Equivalence, translation, and the role of the translator; *Quid pro quo*: Contractual semiosis and translation. There is also an Introduction, a Conclusion and a considerable bibliography.

cannot think that "information" is really the equivalent of "meaning-potentialities", which would appear to take into account all the meaningful aspects of the sign, or at least as many as come to the minds of translator or reader. Now a metaphor is fraught with meaning, and in interlingual translation it often happens that the same, similar or comparable metaphors exist in both languages, with comparable or identical "meaning-potentialities". But if one tries to "translate" such a metaphor in *intralingual* translation, a periphrasis is necessary to "explain" the image, whose power of evocation and creative "poetic" potentialities are inevitably and irretrievably lost.

The question as I see it is thus: what is the context in which the translation (any kind of translation) is carried out? is it the aim of the author to convey "information"? in that case, what is the definition of "information"? - or does it aim at "communication"?

We could say that the aim of intralingual translation is effectively to transmit information: a text is difficult, obscure, archaic etc. and has to be paraphrased for a reader speaking the "same" language.

We could also say that the aim of interlingual translation is "communication" in the poetic sense of the word, an attempt, as is so often said "to create the same impression in the mind of the reader of the translation as that created by the original text in the mind of a native speaker".

But the aim of interlingual translation is also often to transmit information. In this case the process of sign-substitution carried out will be essentially of the *same nature* as that carried out in intralingual translation. The resulting translation will be no more than a paraphrase, the fact that it is a paraphrase in a "different" language having no importance, as a paraphrase is always in a different language terminologically speaking (we could cite here the attempts to translate Shakespeare or the Bible into modern English).

A word about Jakobson's "intersemiotic translation": "verbal > non-verbal" as it is defined, sometimes with the remark "and vice-versa" (i.e.: non-verbal > verbal) which is not usually expatiated upon. Dinda Gorfée appears to envisage this on p. 157 apropos of architectural and musical signs - the main problem being in my view that of having to assume arbitrarily the priority of the linguistic sign and the validity of the application of linguistic concepts ("grammar", "semantics", etc.) to non-linguistic domains, a procedure which pertains more to an abuse of metaphor than to a scientific analysis of the sign. It seems, in effect, that Dinda Gorfée is embarrassed by this problem: "Art is not intended to be explained..." (p. 160), she concludes. Very well, but people spend their lives explaining and describing art: to say that it is not intended to be explained is to avoid the issue. This kind of activity is plainly intersemiotic translation, and the question of "intention" is entirely irrelevant.

A last point: if we are to reject the priority of the linguistic sign while retaining Jakobson's three types of translation (which the author appears to wish to do), another type will have to be added to "intersemiotic translation" that of "non-verbal > non-verbal". This possibility is of course not provided for within Jakobson's linguistic framework, whereas there is no difficulty in inserting it into Peirce's general theory of signs.

The conclusion is that Jakobson's three types of translation have nothing to do with Peirce's three categories, although it might have appeared convenient if they had.

The proof is perhaps as follows: Thirdness includes Secondness and Firstness, Secondness includes Firstness, but intralingual translation does not include nor subsume interlingual translation, just as intralingual translation does not include nor subsume so-called intersemiotic translation. Although the process of sign-transposition carried out in each type of translation is essentially identical (as in any other domain where sign-transposition is necessary) there is no hierarchy involved here. Apart from this process of sign-substitution each type of translation is separate and does not involve or imply any of the others. What distinguishes them is their context, the aim with which they are carried out (their use or function), and the public for whom they are intended.

Another point with which I am not quite in agreement concerns the role of the translator: "it would be a misconstrual of the facts to hold, as is generally done, that the sign is translated by the translator, because it really translates itself", says the author (p. 186), and elsewhere "the translator is merely instrumental", not a flesh-and-blood person" (p. 186), "a passive medium". The context of these remarks is Peirce's anti-psychologism, his preference for the use of the term "quasi-mind" when possible, his insistence that "the study of sign-action does not require knowledge of the exact workings of the human mind" (p. 177). I feel that this insistence on Peirce's anti-psychologism has led the author to go a little too far: "Translators shall accept the compliant role and be considered as bare and anonymous minds" she concludes (p. 190). Anonymous perhaps, but hardly "bare": Does she not point out that utterers and interpreters are in Peirce's own words "repositories of thought" (p. 184)? and in comparing the process of translation with the formulation of a hypothesis does she not say that "In the translation process this would correspond to the more instinctive than rational phase when the text-sign first enters a receptive mind. A trained translator will then, spontaneously and with practiced ease, start generating a flow of ideas", (p. 182). It is difficult to see how a "receptive" mind can be "bare" unless it is considered as some sort of receptacle which can be filled or emptied at will; and how can a "bare" mind be "practiced" and capable of "generating a flow of ideas"? Signs beget signs, and stand for something to somebody: the translator can translate only from signs which stand for something to him...

I should personally formulate the situation as follows: the translator can be no more than the sum of his own fields of interpretants, his own culture and experience. Thus, given a certain translator, a certain text can be translated only in a certain way or ways which correspond to this experience. This means *inevitably* that 1) every translation will be different according to the individual translator, and that no two translators will ever produce identical translations, and furthermore that an identical translator may, and probably will, produce more or less differing translations at different stages of his career, and 2) that accordingly a translator, even if we forget his "flesh-and-blood" aspect and are not interested in his psychology, is an *individual*, a "repository of thought", combined in a *particular* way. Perhaps "inevitably" is the key-notion here; but the fact that such or such a translation is inevitable given the translator, does not mean, in my opinion, that "the sign translates itself" nor that the mind is "bare", nor that the role of the translator is merely "passive" or "instrumental", but simply that, as the author remarks herself on p. 188 the translator has only "limited freedom".

The proposed stages in the translator's "quasi?" mind (p. 182) also seem to call for some modification. The first stage should be the *reading* of the source-text by the

translator in the same spirit as that in which he would read *any* text, destined to be translated or not, and he must first ask himself if he understands it. I cannot think that this stage corresponds to the author's proposed first phase "more instinctive than rational", when the translator's "trained", "practiced" but "bare" mind "will then, spontaneously ... start generating a flow of ideas ...", an "impromptu translation" (p. 182). The translator must then in my view attempt to express the source-text as exactly as he can in the target language: this is not or should not be, an "impromptu" translation. Indeed, I would go further: impromptu translations are dangerous and should be avoided: they often leave traces of themselves which are difficult to eliminate in the "final" version. Translation at any stage entails reflection and deliberation. I much prefer the term "tentative" which the author uses in the same paragraph. It will be objected that I am merely quibbling about terminological details, and have been doing so frequently since the beginning of this article. The reason is simply that Dinda Gorlée's book is so important for the history of translation theory and for the perspectives it provides for the future that this kind of objection has to be made.

For the present reviewer, the importance of the book resides chiefly in the following points:

- The author does not take the linguistic sign as her point of departure: translation of the linguistic sign can be treated satisfactorily only within a general theory of signs, and Peirce's system is the most comprehensive to date (which is a point I have tried to make myself on several occasions).

- In Peirce's system translation is not only provided for, but explained and described in detail under the name of semiosis. For the neophyte, chapter 3, "On the Fundamentals of the Semiotics of Charles S. Peirce" is a comprehensive and methodical account of all the concepts involved. It is something of a prowess to have done this so convincingly in 37 pages and the chapter is worth reading for itself.

- The author points out the great interest for the translator of Peirce's distinction between Immediate Object (within the semiosis), and Dynamical Object (outside the semiosis) (pp. 133-139, 171-173) to account for varying degrees and levels of translatability. This could have been usefully developed, and the present reviewer regrets that this has not been done. It would have at least shown that in spite of (or because of) the "theoretical complexity" of Peirce's sign-system, it does not only work "on a level of abstraction which is as intellectually stimulating as it is relatively inaccessible to practical application" (p. 218). Dinda Gorlée is too modest, for herself and for Peirce. The application of theories is not an indecent activity, indeed, if a theory cannot be applied, it has no pragmatic function and might as well be passed over in silence. My impression is rather that the author is perfectly cognizant of the possible practical applications of Peircean theory, otherwise the book would not, and could not, have been written.

- The careful analysis of Wittgenstein's and Walter Benjamin's theories of language in relation to Peircean theory. This analysis involves no straining, - no use of Procrustean beds, as in the case of the comparison with Jakobson. On the contrary, the profound affinity of these three thinkers is dynamically and convincingly presented.

- The extensive documentation provided, which makes of this collection of "essays" almost a text-book of translation theory. It must be noted in passing that there is, however, no "namedropping" here; lengthy quotations and abundant notes illustrate the relevancy and appositeness of every reference, inciting the reader to learn more about some less well-known or less accessible texts. In this connection, an Index would have been useful.

- the perseverance with which the author attempts to bring some order to the "utter terminological and conceptual confusion" (p. 165) at present reigning in translation-theory. On this subject, chapter 9 on "Equivalence, translation, and the role of the translator" (pp. 164-190) is particularly relevant and enlightening. If the author does not solve all the problems, she has at least the great merit of stating them clearly, with all the implications involved, which is an essential and salutary first step towards their solution.

- lastly, the present reviewer could not be more in agreement with one of the author's final remarks, namely that a theory of text should "precede the development of a full and coherent translation-semiotics" (p. 224). She announces her intention of elaborating a Peircean "text-semiotics". If this project is realised, it will no doubt fill an enormous gap in the development and application of Peircean theory with reference to present-day preoccupations.

This book is, says the author, "a voyage into uncharted waters" (p. 6). Here again, I am not entirely in agreement, but only because, for the reader, Dinda Goriée's semiotic itinerary can be traced through her text. She has, herself, "charted" abductively, a new departure, which should be an escape-route open to free translators from the dualistic prison in which they have long been confined.

Janice Deledalle-Rhodes

Max Bense

# Die Eigenrealität der Zeichen

Aus dem Nachlaß herausgegeben  
von Elisabeth Walther

Die Ausführungen in diesem Buch bilden den Abschluß zahlreicher Veröffentlichungen Max Benses zur Semiotik, die seit 1967 erschienen sind. Neben seinen ästhetischen Untersuchungen sind zweifellos die semiotischen Abhandlungen als der wichtigste Teil seines theoretischen Werkes anzusehen.

Das Zeichen als triadische Relation in einem prinzipiell offenen Zeichen-Universum verbindet Max Bense hier mit der „Daseins-Relativität“ Schellers, der Kosmos-Vorstellung Hausdorffs und dem einseitigen, endlosen Band Möbius', das er als endloses „Zeichenband“ versteht.

Durch die Begründung der Zeichen auf ihre Eigenrealität ist eine neue – semiotische – Einheit des Weltbildes erreicht worden, die Max Bense in seinen früheren Schriften noch nicht so deutlich darlegen konnte, auch wenn er die Vermittlung zwischen Welt und Bewußtsein durch Zeichen mehrfach hervorgehoben hat. Da die Kunstwerke bzw. das Ästhetische durch den Begriff der Eigenrealität in diesen letzten Überlegungen Max Benses eine schärfere Konturierung erfahren haben, wurden damit auch weitere fruchtbare Anregungen zu allgemein semiotischen, ästhetischen und (möglicherweise) mathematischen Untersuchungen gegeben, mit deren Ausarbeitung schon nach den ersten Veröffentlichungen zur Eigenrealität begonnen wurde.

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## ABDUKTIVE HERMENEUTIK

Susanne Rohr: *Über die Schönheit des Findens. Die Binnenstruktur menschlichen Verstehens nach Charles S. Peirce: Abduktionslogik und Kreativität*, Stuttgart, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1993.

Die semiotische Reformulierung der hermeneutischen Verstehenssituation unter dem Aspekt abduktiven Schlußfolgerns ist eine ambitionierte Themenstellung von größter Relevanz - sowohl für die philosophische Rezeption der Peirceschen Semiotik, als auch für deren texttheoretische und ästhetische Applikation. Susanne Rohr geht es sowohl darum zu zeigen, daß abduktives Schlußfolgern eine zentrale Rolle im Interpretationsprozeß einnimmt, als auch darum, Kreativität als konstitutives Moment der Interpretation auszuzeichnen.

Die Abduktion ist laut Peirce die einzig "echt synthetische" Schlußform und zugleich der "erste Schritt im gesamten Prozeß des Schlußfolgerns" (CP 6.468)<sup>1</sup>, gefolgt von Deduktion und Induktion. Für Peirce ist alles Denken eine kontinuierliche Interpretation von Zeichen, die zugleich Bestandteil eines Arguments sind - Interpretieren bedeutet Schlußfolgern. Die Abduktion ist nach Peirce der "Prozeß, eine erklärende Hypothese zu bilden" (CP 5.171). Abduktives Schlußfolgern besteht "im Studium der Tatsachen und dem Erfinden einer Theorie, um diese zu erklären" (CP 5.145), ist also eine Operation, die sowohl dem *Finden* als auch dem *Erfinden* von erklärenden Hypothesen dient. Eben dieser Doppelcharakter der Abduktion als interpretativ-rekonstruktive und als innovativ-konstruktive Form des Schließens zeichnet abduktives Folgern gegenüber dem deduktiven Ableiten der logischen Konsequenzen und dem induktiven Überprüfen der praktischen Konsequenzen aus. In der Abduktion verbinden sich zwei Aspekte von Kreativität: Einmal das kreative *Erfinden* im Sinne der Neukonstruktion. Zum anderen das kreative *Finden* im Sinne des Identifizierens und im Sinne des Integrierens einer möglichen (d. h. hypothetischen Erklärung) in einen Begründungszusammenhang.

Vor diesem Hintergrund geht es Rohr um die Frage: "Können wir verstehen, warum wir verstehen können? (...) oder ist Kreativität gegen die Enthüllung ihrer Konstituenten immun?" (7). Diese Fragen stehen im Kontext der zentralen Problemstellung des Buches, nämlich "das Konzept des Hermeneutischen Zirkels" und den Methodendualismus zwischen Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften, insbesondere das scheinbar schwer versöhnliche Verhältnis zwischen Erklären und Verstehen, "auf der Grundlage der Abduktionslogik in einem neuen Zusammenhang" zu denken (9). Die gleiche Problemstellung hatte bereits Karl-Otto Apel in verschiedenen Aufsätzen zum Verhältnis von Transzendentalphilosophie, Hermeneutik und Pragmatismus entwickelt. Jedoch lehnt Rohr Apels transzendentalhermeneutischen Ansatz ab und argumentiert mit Klaus Oehler, daß "die Apelsche Darstellung der Leistung Peirces bei der Lösung der Kantischen Subjekt-Objekt-Problematik hinter der von Peirce *tatsächlich* vollführten zurückbleibt" (30). Insbesondere Apels Berufung "auf angeborene 'Universalien der Sprachfähigkeit' bei der Suche nach anthropologischen Konstanten, die das Verständigungs-Apriori im Sinne des Sprach-Instinkts des Menschen begründen sollen" (30), sieht Rohr mit Oehler als Reduktionismus des Peirceschen Pragmatizismus. Den doppelten Nachweis, Apels Peirce-Interpretation ver-

<sup>1</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Band I-VI, (Ed.) Charles Hartshorne und Paul Weiss. Harvard University Press 1931-1935. Band VII, VIII. (Ed.) Arthur W. Burks. 1958.

passee die Pointe des Peirceschen Ansatzes, und seine Bezugnahme auf das Instinkt-Apriori stelle einen Reduktionismus dar, bleibt Rohr leider schuldig. Überhaupt scheint eine angemessene Behandlung oder gar Widerlegung Apels auf gerade einmal vier Seiten kaum möglich.

Vielmehr drängt sich der Verdacht auf, daß es sich bei der Ablehnung Apels um eine theoretische Vorentscheidung handelt. Eine Vorentscheidung freilich, die Rohr wertvoller Möglichkeiten für ihren Versuch einer semiotischen Reformulierung des hermeneutischen Verstehensproblems beraubt. Denn auch ohne Apel in seinem problematischen Versuch einer transzendentalpragmatischen Letztbegründung recht zu geben, hätte man wichtige Einsichten aus seinen Bemühungen einer semiotischen Transformation der Erkenntnistheorie ziehen können. So entwickelt Apel in seinem Aufsatz "Von Kant zu Peirce: Die semiotische Transformation der Transzendentalen Logik"<sup>2</sup> den meines Erachtens höchst interessanten Gedanken, das Vermögen zum abduktiven Schlußfolgern als Analogon der "Synthesis der Apperzeption" bei Kant zu deuten. Das Vermögen zum Abduzieren wird laut Peirce von einem angeborenen Rateinstinkt geleitet. Und unter diesem Gesichtspunkt scheint Apels Bezugnahme auf das Instinkt-Apriori keineswegs so unplausibel, wie Rohr glauben machen will. Hatte Peirce doch unter anderem in seinem Aufsatz "Guessing"<sup>3</sup>, den Rohr allerdings nicht erwähnt und der auch in der Bibliographie nicht zu finden ist, die Relevanz des Instinktes und des detektivischen Spürsinnens im Sinne des Vorverständnisses in die "geheimen Gesetze des Universums" behandelt.

Auch eine zweite Unterlassung muß hier bemerkt werden. Umberto Ecos Ansatz einer "interpretativen Kooperation" wird von Rohr überhaupt nicht erwähnt, obwohl insbesondere in *Lector in Fabula*<sup>4</sup> und in *Der Streit der Interpretationen*<sup>5</sup> ein dezidiert Ansatz zur Reformulierung der Verstehensproblematik entwickelt wurde. So heißt es bei Eco: "... der Text ist ein Objekt, das die Interpretation im Verlauf ihrer zirkulären Anstrengungen um die eigene Schlüssigkeit bildet auf der Basis dessen, was sie als ihr Resultat erschafft. Ich schäme mich nicht, daß ich auf diese Weise den alten und immer noch gültigen hermeneutischen Zirkel definiere. Die Logik der Interpretation ist die Peircesche Logik der 'Abduktion'" (45). Dieses Eco Zitat kann als Kondensat des Rohrschen Projekts der Reformulierung des hermeneutischen Ansatzes unter dem Aspekt der Abduktion gelesen werden und hätte, wenn es zur Kenntnis genommen worden wäre, Anschlußmöglichkeiten innerhalb der semiotischen Theoriendebatte über Verstehen und ästhetischem Erleben eröffnet - zum Beispiel, die Unterschiede zwischen ästhetisch-kreativen Abduktionen einerseits und hermeneutisch über- oder untercodierten Abduktionen andererseits herauszuarbeiten.

Trotz dieser Schwächen im Ansatz gelingt Rohr ein auffallend origineller Versuch, den Dialog zwischen der semiotischen und der hermeneutischen Tradition wiederzubeleben. Besonders hervorzuheben ist dabei ihr Anliegen, den abduktiven Schluß im Kontext der Peirceschen Kategorienlehre zu behandeln. Hier demonstriert Rohr, daß sie zu den "happy few" gehört, denen es gelingt, die zum Teil sperrige Peircesche Terminologie in einen lebendigen Stil einzubetten.

Uwe Wirth

<sup>2</sup> In: Karl-Otto Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie*, Bd. 2. Frankfurt 1981 (1973).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, "Guessing". In: The Hound and Horn 1929. (267-285).

<sup>4</sup> Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula*, München 1987 (1979).

<sup>5</sup> Umberto Eco, *Der Streit der Interpretationen*, Konstanz 1987.



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### Inhalt

Elisabeth Walther	Nachruf auf unseren Verleger	3
Winfried Nöth	Semiotic Foundations of the Cognitive Paradigm	5
Gérard Deledalle	Peirce's New Paradigms	17
Ignacio Gómez de Liaño	Fantasías y realidades, o los modos del discurrir	31
Dinda L. Gorrée, <i>Semiotics and the Problem of Translation: with special reference to the semiotics of C. S. Peirce</i> (J. Deledalle-Rhodes)		49
Susanne Rohr, <i>Über die Schönheit des Findens. Die Binnenstruktur menschlichen Verstehens nach C. S. Peirce</i> (Uwe Wirth)		55
<i>Nachrichten</i>		
Karl Herrmann, Zur Ausstellung Reinhold Nägele und dessen Sohn Thomas Nägele in der Städtischen Galerie in Murrhardt		57
Uwe Wirth, Projekt: Arbeitskreis für Abduktionsforschung		63
Helmar Frank, 1993 - Rückblick auf ein Jubiläumsjahr der europäischen Bildungstechnologie		67
Nachtrag zum Artikel von Udo Bayer in Heft 70/71		
Inhalt des 18. Jahrgangs		71