

Spring 2008  
Comparative Studies 373  
**Translating Literatures and Cultures**  
5 credit hours, GEC course  
TR 3:30-5:18  
Building/Room  
**Dr. Nina Berman**

This course familiarizes students with problems inherent to translating literatures and cultures. We will read a range of theoretical texts from the field of translation studies and identify key issues, such as the question of equivalence and/or incommensurability of different languages. The notion that translation always "rewrites" a text, the fact that translations are composed for specific audiences, the role of editors and publishing houses, and the most recent phenomenon of creating and translating texts and media for global audiences are among the issues discussed in this course. In addition, we will consider select situations where translation is crucial to cross-cultural communication.

The theoretical part of the course will be accompanied by a practical part, that is, every student will be asked to produce translations into English from a foreign language he or she is familiar with. These translations will then be discussed in class. The emphasis here will be on identifying problems that occur in the process of translating, and we will connect the classroom translations to central aspects of the theory discussed. Basic knowledge of a foreign language (two quarters minimum or equivalent) is sufficient to participate in this task. In order to illustrate this fact we would like to provide an example: If a German native speaker who is new to the US context hears an American ask the question, "How are you?", he or she will respond with an elaborate answer. The German will understand the English phrase literally and will assume that it means the same as the German phrase and direct translation "Wie geht es dir?" (which, in the German context, would be asked to elicit a detailed answer). The German will not translate the "How are you?" into "Hallo" which would be the accurate translation. As this example shows, problems of translation begin on such basic levels.

The course fulfills the learning objectives of the GEC "**Diversity (2) International Issues, Non-Western or Global**" category:

- Students exhibit an understanding of political, economic, cultural, physical, and social differences among the nations of the world, including a specific examination of non-Western culture.

The course fulfills the objectives of the GEC "**Cultures and Ideas**" category:

- Students develop abilities to analyze, appreciate, and interpret major forms of human thought and expression
- Students develop abilities to understand how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior

**Specific objectives:** In this course students are taught to

- write and speak with clarity and precision so as to advance thoughts and arguments coherently and persuasively
- engage in critical analysis

- understand research methods used in the field of translation studies
- achieve an understanding of and develop an appreciation for cultural diversity and global interdependence of the world
- appreciate and understand other cultures and modes of thinking through facility with languages other than English

The course also

- requires students to reflect upon a range of theoretical questions relevant to the study of cross-cultural communication
- discusses the historical and culturally specific nature of language
- exposes students to theoretical readings that highlight central issue of translating texts from one language into another, from one cultural and historical context to another, and from one time period to another
- introduces students to a wide range of cultural concepts
- encourages students to think about the ways in which cultural concepts are expressed through culturally and historically distinct languages
- discusses the relationship between belief systems and linguistic expressions
- encourages students to reflect upon the various challenges of cross-cultural communication

**Texts (at SBX):**

**Book**

Sandra Bermann, Michael Wood, eds. Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation

**Reader**

Articles by André Lefevere, Susan Bassnett, Umberto Eco, Walter Benjamin, Clifford Geertz, George Steiner, Susan Berk-Seligson, Paul Reitter

In addition, select examples from fiction, non-fiction, and film will serve to illuminate central problems related to translations (such as mistranslations or miscommunications).

**Grading:**

Participation (20%), 2 translations (one draft, one final version each; 40%; to be presented in class, beginning April 19), one term paper (either an annotated translation, an analysis of a translation, or a discussion of a translation related theoretical aspect; 40%; abstract due May 9; due date: June 8)

**Prerequisite:** English 110 or equivalent; two quarters of foreign language study or equivalent

**The course fulfills the GEC Arts and Humanities “Cultures and Ideas” and “Diversity/International Issues, Non-Western or Global” requirements.**

*All students are responsible for reading, understanding, and following university rules regarding cheating and plagiarism, which will be strictly enforced (see Faculty Rule 3335-31-02 on Academic Misconduct in the Ohio State University Student Handbook).*

*Any students who feel that they may be academically disadvantaged due to the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor(s) and the Office of Disability Services in Room 150 Pomerene Hall (292-3307) to arrange accommodations.*

## Weekly syllabus

### Monday, March 27

- Introduction

### Wednesday, March 29

- Comparison of different translations, identification of key issues
- Paul Reitter, "That Other Metamorphosis"

### Monday, April 3

- Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description"
- André Lefevere, Susan Bassnett, *Constructing Cultures*, "Where are we in Translation Studies?"

### Wednesday, April 5

- Umberto Eco, *Experiences in Translation*

### Monday, April 10

- André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, . . .*, ""The system: patronage"; The system: poetics"; "Translation: the categories"; "Translation: ideology"

### Wednesday, April 12

- Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator"
- Samuel Weber, "A Touch of Translation: On Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator"

### Monday, April 17

- Jonathan E. Abel, "Translation as Community: The Opacity of Modernizations of *Genji monogatari*"
- Lawrence Venuti, "Local Contingencies: Translation and National Identities"

### Wednesday, April 19

- André Lefevere, "Anthology"
- Emily Apter, "Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction"
- student classroom presentations begin

### Monday, April 24

- George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, "The Claims of Theory"
- student presentations

### Wednesday, April 26

- Susan Bassnett, "Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation"
- Yopie Prins, "Metrical Translation: Nineteenth-Century Homers and the Hexameter Mania"
- student presentations

### Monday, May 1

- Susan Bassnett, "Still Trapped in the Labyrinth: Further Reflections on Translation and Theatre"
- student presentations

### Wednesday, May 3

- Andre Lefevere, "Acculturating Bertolt Brecht"
- student presentations

### Monday, May 8

- Gambier & Gottlieb, eds., *(Multi)media Translation: Concepts, Practices, and Research*, introduction; Patrick Catrysse, “Multimedia & Translation: Methodological Considerations
- student presentations

Wednesday, May 10

- Michael Wood, “The Languages of Cinema”
- student presentations

Monday, May 15

- abstract for final paper due
- Susan Berk-Seligson, *The Bilingual Courtroom: Court Interpreters in the Judicial Process*, “The Ethnography of the Bilingual Courtroom”
- Lynn Visson, “Simultaneous Interpretation: Language and Cultural Difference”
- student presentations

Wednesday, May 17

- Henry Staten, “Tracking the ‘Native Informant’: Cultural Translation as the Horizon of Literary Translation”
- student presentations on final project begin

Monday, May 22

- David Damrosch, “Death in Translation”
- student presentations on final project

Wednesday, May 24

- student presentations on final project continue

Monday, May 29

—no classes—

Wednesday, May 31

- student presentations conclude
- final discussion

## Guidelines for paper assignments

- I. Two short papers, including classroom presentations (one draft, one final version each; 40%; to be presented in class, beginning April 19)

identify a problem related to translation (as per our discussion in class; a word/sentence/passage, an idiom, a concept; the problem could focus on culture and/or on theoretical questions)

present the problem in class; provide a one-page handout in which you analyze and comment on the problem

after the discussion in class, revise your paper by incorporating relevant comments, and submit it within a week following the classroom presentation

the final text (for each of the two presentations) should be 250-500 words

- II. Term paper

You can hand in either

A. an annotated translation (that is, choose a text to translate, and write notes explaining why you decided to translate certain terms/phrases the way you did)

B. a detailed analysis of a translation or a comparison of two or more translations

C. a discussion of a translation-related theoretical aspect

In all cases, you are asked to make use of the theoretical material we discussed in class. You may also draw on the handouts provided throughout the quarter. Please identify and **reference** your sources; that is, when you speak of “faithfulness,” look at what Umberto Eco said, what Lefevere said, what Steiner said, and think about how they differ/overlap, and which critic/analysis you find most useful.

The paper should be 6-8 pages long (1500-2000 words, not counting the original text in option A or the translation in option B if it was not composed by yourself).

the final paper is worth 40% of your grade

**an abstract of the paper is due May 15**

the paper is due Wednesday, June 7, 4 pm (electronic submission is fine)

attach a bibliography in MLA or Chicago style format

