

In a Wilderness of Mirrors: The Ethics of Translation in Cold-War Espionage

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Abstract

The article looks at translation in the context of US Cold War (counter)intelligence. Here translation finds itself in a situation in which scarcity of information turns originals into fragments rather than proper texts. This changes the way the translator works: s/he has to constantly justify his/her decisions, acting in several capacities or with different experts and foregrounding his/her presence in the text. This presence also points to the most difficult of ethical choices to be made. Translation mediates between conflicting or rivalling parties. To mediate, the translator must learn about and identify with an/the other, yet this other is an enemy. The other is studied but not in order to be appreciated, but rather to be kept at a distance, as if behind a glass wall. The translator, like other (counter)espionage agents, must remember that s/he works not against but *for* the party to which s/he has pledged allegiance. The allegiance may be towards the party for which the translator works, or for the country in which s/he lives, and where s/he acts as a patriot. But the allegiance may be toward the ‘enemy’ – the absolute other – and here the translator’s loyalty is perceived simultaneously as treachery. The ethical ‘wilderness of mirrors’ to be navigated by translators within the (counter)espionage setting reveals a complex layering of multiple acts of fidelity and betrayal, agency and double agency, which illuminate the wider paradoxes of translation’s mediation of difference.

Keywords: translation; ethics; espionage; counterintelligence; patriotism; treason

James Angleton, a CIA counterintelligence chief, described counterintelligence work as wanderings ‘in a wilderness of mirrors’. Using an image from T.S. Eliot’s poem ‘Gerontion’ (1920), Angleton here sought to express the challenges of operating in a world where secretiveness, deception and double-crossing reigned, and where one was never sure which truth to believe. But the wilderness of mirrors may be confusing not only for (counter)intelligence agents and decision-makers, it may also throw translators off balance.

Translation is an active component of (counter)intelligence activities, given that such activities are more often than not carried out across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The deceptive terrain in which translation finds itself exerts influence on translation and translators. Some translators may lose their sense of moral direction; some may choose to take advantage of the fogginess of the world of mirages and duplicity and try and catch fish in the muddy water when right and wrong may look alike. Of course, navigating the treacherous waters separating betrayal from treachery is the very challenge facing any translator in his/her approach to source and target languages. This parallel between translation in general and the specific ethical and practical contradictions faced by translators working within (counter)espionage is a guiding frame for my analysis.

Translators find themselves wandering in the wilderness of mirrors. There are different kinds of mirrors and reflections in them create intricate mazes. I will examine the maze created by the unique specificity of the textual features that translators in (counter)intelligence (henceforth – (C)I) have to deal with and how those textual features impinge on the ethical paths the (C)I translators must choose to take through the maze.

Strange Beasts

When one of the prominent British spycatchers, Peter Wright, switched his career – from the civil sector to MI5 (the counterespionage section of the British Security Service), he described the switch as a start of ‘a new life in the shadows’ (1987: 27). Such is the nature of life and work in the realm of (C)I: they are hidden from the eyes of the public. It is only natural that translators, when practicing in the shadows, may encounter or – themselves – produce strange beasts, very different as compared to what translators find and create ‘in the open’. In the (C)I context, translation does not necessarily handle ‘usual’ texts and it does not necessarily work in the same way as elsewhere: taking a source text and rendering it into a target language in the form of a stand-alone target text. To be sure, there are exotic types of text that translation faces and produces outside (C)I. Take for instance, Nabokov’s controversial translation of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* (1964) which, duly, was diagnosed as a ‘strange case’ (Wilson, 1965). One of the peculiarities of Nabokov’s English version of Pushkin’s text is the multitude of explanatory footnotes. The body of footnotes and commentaries is exceptionally extensive; in them, Nabokov provides the linguistic, cultural and historical information that is intended to help the reader appreciate Pushkin’s novel in verse. The footnotes compete with or, as some might say, eclipse the translated text. The result is an unusual text: it is a genre centaur – partly, a translation and partly, a piece of literary scholarship (and also partly a vanity piece; Warner 1986: 186). Yet, arguably, such strange cases are *rarae aves*; in the shadows, however, you may come across whole herds of such or similar strange beasts.

A prime example of this is an extensive corpus known as *Venona*. This is a body of as many as 2,900 (over five thousand pages of text) of partially translated Soviet intelligence messages declassified in the mid-1990s in the USA (see the link to the online collection published by NSA in the entry *Venona declassified NSA* in References). Source texts were elaborately coded telegrams sent between Moscow and Soviet spies stationed in the USA and the UK. The USA counterintelligence started collecting these telegrams during WWII but initially, since the Soviet Union was an ally and since the messages were elaborately coded and required deciphering, the texts were simply shelved. Attempts at decoding them were made only later, starting from 1943. Inevitably, deciphering came hand in hand with translation and the two were further aided by linguistic analysis and the utilisation of any known factual contexts, or in (C)I parlance – collateral (evidence).

A typical message was structured as follows. After a succinct archival reference, there would be a text consisting of sentences peppered with numerous square-bracketed indicators or insertions. Some of these indicators – letters or numbers – sent the reader to a corpus of post-textual notes and comments. The corpus of such notes and comments was often longer than the translated telegram. A number of insertions in the square brackets also told the reader how many ‘groups’ were ‘unrecovered’ (see Appendix 1).

The telegrams were very brief. That alone posed a problem as there was little elaboration that would allow the cryptanalyst-cum-translator to guess the meaning. The sample text adduced in Appendix 1 includes the translator’s complaints stating that some things could not be translated in any clearer way because the necessary contextual information was missing. For instance, there is Note [a] to the phrase ‘On 8th August BARCh had a meeting with [a former acquaintance], Doctor FUCHS...’ The alternative version offered by the translator reads as follows: BARCh ‘...had a meeting with [a

former acquaintance] *of* Doctor Fuchs...’ (italicised by me – *S.T.*) The added *of* is a way for the translator to show the possibility of the Russian Genitive case in the original with the possessive meaning here, similar to the English construction: *Doctor Fuchs’s former acquaintance*. Klaus Fuchs was a British physicist working on the atomic bomb project; he also spied for the USSR. The translator gives the following reason for supplying the alternative reading: ‘on technical grounds there is nothing to choose between these two versions. Without collateral it is impossible to say which is the correct one.’

Sometimes the translator(s) had to resort to pure guesswork. The most challenging were the passages with unrecovered, or undecoded, groups. Cryptanalysis and decoding of the telegrams proved to be a real challenge. The plain Russian text had to be retrieved from under several layers of complex coding (the following examples are mine; they are loosely based on West, N. (1999: 12–13).

Groups are sets of letters or digits which stand for words, originally, mostly in Russian. The Soviet process of coding was as follows. Initially the cipher clerk turned the words of a message into four-digit numbers according to a code book, a species of dictionary which had two columns, one containing numbers and the other corresponding words or short phrases (e.g., a noun with a preposition). The sentence ‘Six military ships arrived today’ might be encoded as 8657 3562 1389 2437 6257. Then, the clerk reorganised these four-digit groups into five-digit groups: 86573 56213 89243 76257. Next, s/he used a one-time pad. Each sheet was supposed to be used only once. The code was theoretically undecipherable because there were only two copies of the sheet used to code and decode the message: the cipher clerk sending the message had one copy and the clerk on the receiving end had the other. After being used, both sheets were destroyed.

Using a sheet from a one-time pad, the sending clerk converted the chain of five-digit groups into a set of groups converted mathematically (according to the Fibonacci system). Now the message might have looked as follows: 43563 25660 35462 64882 35768. Finally, this sequence of groups was turned into a letter code in which each digit corresponded to a Latin letter: TZREZ UREEO ZRTEU ETAAU ZRWEA. There are four layers so far. To read the original message *en clair*, one had to move in the opposite direction and, layer by layer, ‘unpeel’ it.

However, this was not all. There were other complications. Sometimes the clerk did not find a word in his/her code book because it had not been used before or because it was a proper name. In such cases s/he needed to spell the word out letter by letter. The clerk would use special ‘SPELL’ and ‘ENDSPELL’ code groups around the word.

There was also a system of transliterating between Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. Some of the messages contained citations from English sources or English proper names. Those English inclusions were spelt using Latin letters.

Finally, Soviet secret services’ jargon was employed. As a result, even after one even after one had deciphered a message, the meaning may still not have been clear. For instance, when there was a reference to ISLAND or ISLANDERS, one had to know that Great Britain and the British were meant. When something was said to have happened in CARTHAGE, the reference was to Washington, D.C. (the hint was at Cato’s famous phrase about the rival of Rome – ‘Carthage is to be destroyed’).

Code groups were not always recovered. If the translator could guess what an unrecovered group might logically mean in this or that context or taking into account a

piece of collateral evidence, s/he would put the guessed phrase in square brackets to distinguish a hunch from a fact. A note would also be added: 'Inserted by the translator' (see Appendix 1, note [c]). The beginning of one sentence consists of ten unrecovered groups followed by the group meaning 'BIRMINGHAM.' The group immediately preceding the city name is likely to be 'in,' so the translator added it. The entire recovered fragment reads '[in] BIRMINGHAM.' The translator supplied an explanatory note: 'The case ending indicates that the preposition 'in' must precede 'BIRMINGHAM.'

A large part of the translators' work was a painful and slow, step-by-step, group-by-group progress in deciphering the Soviet cables and rendering the known fragments from Russian into English. The work was done in cooperation with the CIA and the FBI: whenever the counterespionage organisations found something relevant to the Venona corpus, the existing translations were complemented or amended and a revised version would be produced. A breakthrough in obtaining a new piece of information would lead to further discoveries and work on the entire corpus was a constant, reiterative movement. An example is the document entitled 'Revised Translation of Message on Antenna-Liberal's Wife Ethel' (https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/dated/1948/13aug_special_study.pdf). The explanation for revising the translation is as follows: 'In a report of about 27 April 1948 [...] a translation was given of New York-Moscow message 1657 of 27 November 1944. Further work on this message has so improved the text that a revised translation is in order' (ibid.).

The source texts which were translated were profusely commented upon in the Venona corpus and include a considerable number of translator insertions with question marks, guesses and alternative renditions. This is attributable to the nature of the texts and the profile of the translators which was quite different from that of colleagues dealing with other texts and in different circumstances. In his translation of Pushkin's novel *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov chose to offer the reader not only an English version of the source text but also a detailed commentary on the cultural aspects of Pushkin's text. He did not have to do so. Translators rarely go to such lengths. In the case of the Venona project texts the (C)I translators had no other choice but to adopt an approach comparable to the one Nabokov took upon himself willingly. They had to provide counterintelligence decision makers with as much exhaustive information about the source texts as was possible. They acted thus because the nature of the source texts required them to provide both translations and commentaries and because the post-translational purpose of the texts was to equip decision-makers with sufficiently accurate and detailed information. This is how the translators, while remaining invisible (cf. the prominence of the translator's name in the case of Nabokov's rendition of Pushkin), nonetheless revealed their presence. They turned from invisible mediators to active interpreters and active co-warriors in the service of their country.

Double Vision: Both Visible and Invisible

The (in)visibility of translation is worth examining in greater detail. The nature of the Venona documents creates a paradoxical phenomenon in this context. The translators' visibility, as opposed to their, more usual, invisibility, has been one of the most prominent topics discussed in Translation Studies (Hermans, 1985; Venuti, 1995). Usually the translator's profile gravitates towards invisibility and even subservience (Simeoni, 1998). Yet there are cases when the translator makes him/herself patently

visible as was the case in the Canadian province of Quebec when its francophone community turned to translation as a means of forging their sociocultural identity (see a monograph-size discussion in Brisset, 1995/1990) or in that of feminist translators who did not hesitate to hijack their source texts (von Flotow, 1991).

Arguably, in the Venona corpus one encounters a paradoxical situation in which the translator is in two mutually exclusive states, not unlike Schrödinger's simultaneously dead and alive cat, both visible and invisible to readers of the target text.

On the one hand, translations are not signed and are the result of a collective effort. On the other hand, all translations are accompanied by detailed notes and comments. Notes offer alternative versions of the words and phrases translated in the main body of a telegram when there was no full assurance that the most literal possible translation in the text was correct or made enough sense in English. Notes also provide linguistic information justifying the choices made by the translator. Whenever necessary, they explain, and sometimes in considerable detail, the nature of the Russian phrase or expression or term. To give an example, the phrase 'Report when opportunity occurs [DOKLAD OKAZIEJ]' is provided with the following gloss (note [h] in Appendix 1):

This is an elliptical expression which it is exceedingly hard to interpret without the full context. 'OKAZIEJ', or more correctly 'S OKAZIEJ', is equivalent to the French 'à l'occasion'. To send a report or letter 'S OKAZIEJ' means to send it when the opportunity arises. 'DOKLAD OKAZIEJ' thus suggests that a report was to be sent when an opportunity for sending one arose. If so, the report was presumably to be sent in writing. (BRION could have signalled a report at any time and need not have waited for suitable opportunity.)

The English translation of the Russian original phrase may be misunderstood as starting with an imperative (Report!) followed by a description of when to report: 'when opportunity occurs.' Yet the note clarifies that the Russian phrase means that a report would be sent when an opportunity presented itself. The translator gives a detailed linguistic explanation of the meaning of the Russian expression 'okaziej', even correcting it, comparing it with the French expression, and interprets the meaning of the entire phrase as well as what it meant in that particular situation: BRION waited for an opportunity to send a written report. Thus, while maintaining his/her anonymity, the translator does not hide. S/he actively discusses his/her decisions, remaining simultaneously visible and invisible.

Moreover, the Venona translations go beyond translations only. They also provide comments on the identity of people and places. For instance, BRION and BARCh are mentioned. But who were this BRION or BARCh? To explain that, comments were added. In the cited telegram (Appendix 1), BRION is introduced as 'Lt. Col. [Lieutenant Colonel] I.A. SKLYaROV' and BARCh was 'Simon Davidovich KREMER.' While notes were translational in nature, dealing primarily with linguistic aspects of the text, comments were written by somebody in the capacity of analyst.

Sometimes the intervention on the part of translators required their acting in more than one (translator's) capacity. Let us consider the following example. A note on the meaning and translation of the Russian term DESIATKA (=Ten):

Previously rendered: the Ten. This translation, while justifiable (see below), is misleading for it tends to suggest that DESIATKA was necessarily composed of just ten people. Actually, its quantitative

reference may be no stronger than that of, say, ‘the Four of Clubs’ or ‘Eight Ball.’ A translation of the definition of DESIATKA in the Tolkovy Slovar [Unilingual Russian dictionary] follows; English words for the various meanings are added in brackets: [...] However, speaking in favour of the quantitative interpretation is the use of TROIKA. Its meanings parallel those of DESIATKA; it can mean ‘three horses harnessed abreast to one vehicle’; and it is famous in the history of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) for its application to various triumvirates formed by Lenin and Stalin. (Benson and Warner 1996: 292–3)

Reading this rather extensive note, one finds the trace of a discussion about the best way to render the Russian term ‘desiatka’. A previous rendition of the Russian word as the English ‘ten’ is seen as not precise enough. This point of contention could have come from a translator/editor calling into question his/her colleague’s decision or from one and the same translator who changed his/her opinion. The author of the note goes to great lengths to justify the new translation. S/he suggests borrowing the Russian term and transliterating it rather than using the English equivalent ‘ten’. S/he translates an entire entry from a Russian dictionary considering every nuance of the Russian term’s meaning and usage. Towards the end of the discussion, the author of the note seems to be of two minds as to whether the quantitative aspect is strong enough in the original Russian term. S/he turns to the historical practice of creating triumvirates (troikas) in early Bolshevik history. The translator acts as a sociocultural expert.

Is this splitting hairs? The author of the note did not think so because if desiatkas were to be interpreted as ‘tens’, i.e. groups of ten people, that might mislead those investigating the case. It is known that the Venona team worked closely with FBI and counterespionage organisations in other countries allied to the USA, notably MI5 in the UK.

What is obvious both in the translations and the accompanying notes and comments is that whoever produced them was/were trying to provide the decision makers with as much information as possible, despite the danger of producing texts that would be hard for somebody less familiar with the Russian language and with Russian and Soviet culture, history or society to appreciate. But there was something of paramount importance at stake, something that demanded precision and called for the translator’s clarifications.

Making her/himself visible (rather than, as usual, invisible), the translator appears to reveal his/her true allegiance to the language and culture of the ‘target’ text, thereby ‘betraying’ the language and culture of the source text. Yet, as we will see in what follows, in the counterintelligence wilderness of mirrors, appearances can be deceptive and there are layers of treachery and fidelity that translators can get caught up in, especially when the other whose texts are being mediated, is the ‘absolute’ other, that is, a mortal enemy, and when assigning loyalty to a translator or a double agent itself becomes a treacherous business. The profiles of some of the team members are well documented. The fact that these translators not only partly revealed themselves through their notes and comments but were rendered fully visible makes it convenient for us to use them to discuss other aspects of the Venona project’s ethical aspects.

The Butterfly Effect

Meredith Gardner was a US linguist with knowledge of German, Sanskrit, Lithuanian, Spanish, French, Japanese and Russian. He acted as a cryptanalyst and translator. In fact, he was the principal code-breaker in the Venona project.

Peter Wright recollected that for Gardner, whom Wright described as a modest and scholarly man, Venona ‘was almost an art form’ and the ‘cryptanalytical break he had made possible was a thing of mathematical beauty’ (Wright, 1987: 185). Wright recalls Gardner saying: ‘I never wanted it [the Venona project] to get anyone into trouble’ (ibid.). By anyone, Gardner meant those who became victims of the McCarthyist witch-hunting that swept across the American society in the wake of the Venona discovery of Soviet spies and, in particular, Ethel Rosenberg.

Translators/cryptanalysts may have been carried away in solving puzzles. They may also have been driven by their patriotism, doing their best to ensure their side prevailed against its international rivals. What the ratio of the desire to break a code and the desire to help your country may be is a moot question. What is unquestionable is the paradox at the heart of (counter)intelligence work: one engages in activities that are hardly moral – stealing secrets, surreptitiously eavesdropping and reading private correspondence, exposing what is supposed to remain confidential – yet for a cause that the agent considers entirely moral: that of helping one’s country defeat the hostile other. It is this disjuncture between one’s actions and one’s motives – between the ethics of everyday life and the ethics of warfare – that explains why ‘the profession of [(counter)espionage] will seem questionable to people of honor and virtue’ (Cole, 2015: 2).

Gardner’s love of ‘mathematical beauty’ may have seemed innocent to him but it was used in a way that was beyond his control and cost Ethel Rosenberg and her husband their lives. There is no starker a reminder of the fact that translators can never be mere mediators; they are always compelled to make ethical choices – the more so when they are operating in situations of conflict. Gardner did not want to get anyone into trouble, but he did. He might have ‘consciously chosen a life of the mind, a world of cerebral puzzles and intellectual pleasures [...b]ut now he was caught up in something very real and very troubling, and he blamed his own vanity for goading him on’ (Blum, 2018: Ch. 38).

Perhaps one might doubt the opinion Gardner seems to have had about his work. He knew full well that his and his colleagues’ translations were used to round up conspiratorial networks. In a report on the circulation of the Venona materials, Gardner wrote the following (some words marked as [X] below were covered up):

[...] Gardner realized from near the beginning that the contents of [X] text would be sensational [...] interesting leads [were communicated to Col. Hayes [Armed Forces Security Agency’s Chief] for transmittal to Col. Forney [the Chief of the US Army’s intelligence unit] or others who could advantageously exploit them. Such leads were communicated from time to time over the following year, and collateral in return was routed through Col. Hayes to Mr. Gardner. [By 1948] it was amply plain that the FBI was the logical recipient of [the Venona material]; hence direct liaison with that agency through Robert Joseph Lamphere was established on 19 October 1948 [...] It was obvious that a considerable part of the [Venona] material would interest the CIA, and as has been seen, members of CIA had access to certain early reports from at least October 1948. No satisfactory way to channel later specific information to the proper place in CIA existed,

however, until 1952, [but now] direct liaison between Gardner and [X] of CIA was arranged for and the security of [the Venona] material at CIA was taken care of. (https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/undated/meredith_gardner.pdf)

Thus, Gardner made the FBI and the CIA aware of his progress and they, in turn, would update him about freshly obtained relevant collateral material.

Gardner worked particularly closely with the FBI agent Robert Lamphere. Gardner decoded the Soviet cables and when he came across codenames of Soviet spies, he would pass the information to Lamphere. Lamphere would take over and, using the FBI's resources, hunt the suspects down. Arguably, Gardner's motive was not pure love of art. He acted as a patriot of his country who did his best to rid it of spies and ultimately help it defeat its enemies. When one looks at Gardner's translation/cryptanalyst work, everything seems understandable if not praiseworthy. But the one-time CIA chief James Angleton called counterintelligence a wilderness of mirrors for a reason. Not everything there may turn out to be what it seems. In this treacherous landscape one is prone to making mistakes and sometimes they prove costly or even tragic.

To give an example, at one point in his work, Gardner revised a translation of the telegram from New York to Moscow dated 27 November, 1944 (https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/dated/1948/13aug_special_study.pdf). The telegram was about the wife of 'Liberal,' the covername of Julius Rosenberg. She was introduced as Ethel, 29 years old, 'a fellow countryman' since 1938, which in coded CIA parlance meant that she joined the US Communist Party in 1938; she was described as 'well-developed politically'; she knew about her husband's work but 'in view of her delicate health [she did] not work' (ibid.). Based on his studies of the Soviet cables, Gardner concluded that in Soviet espionage jargon, the Russian verb *rabotat* (to work) acquired a special meaning – to do '(conspiratorial) work in the interests of the USSR.' (ibid.) This is what the word meant when used about Ethel's husband: 'She knows about her husband's work [...]' (ibid.). It is what the word might have meant in the same text when a certain engineer, Mazurin, was said to be 'working at ARSENIUS's [ARSENIY] plant' (ibid.). Gardner suggested that his interpretation of the Russian verb meaning *to work* explained what Mazurin did for the agent named ARSENIY: 'If 'work' is so interpreted [...] further light may be thrown on the meaning of ZAVOD (plant, works). ARSENIUS's plant might be ARSENIUS's net' (ibid.; underscored in the original). Yet Gardner was not completely certain and therefore he added in parenthesis: '(However, MAZARIN is an engineer and might work at a real plant. Then, if ARSENIUS is an agent, this might be 'the plant that ARSENIUS spies on')' (ibid.).

Ethel's husband did conspiratorial work for the USSR – Julius Rosenberg was a Soviet spy. The word might have been used in the same incriminating meaning about another two suspected agents – Mazarin and Arsenius. Gardner made a logical conjecture: 'In the same way, the work that ETHEL cannot do in view of her delicate health may not be the earning of her bread and butter, but conspiratorial work' (ibid.). It is noteworthy that usually agents were called by their covernames, not their real names. Ethel was referred to by her Christian name, yet this nuance escaped Gardner. He concluded that, based on the linguistic evidence as well as the circumstantial evidence (Ethel knew about her husband being a Soviet spy), she also might have been a spy who temporarily stopped working for health reasons.

The FBI investigator assigned to work with Gardner, Robert Lamphere, was less than impressed by the fruit of Gardner's cogitation and dismissed the tentative nature of his conclusions. The cue he heard from Gardner's translation/interpretation was purely operational: there was another spy and she had to be apprehended. An inadvertently misleading gloss on the source text by an all-too-visible translator was, in turn, misread by the audience of the target text, with devastating ethical consequences. For later it turned out that, although Ethel Rosenberg was privy to her husband's secret life of a Soviet spy, she was not a spy. The translator's error cost Ethel her life: in 1953 both she and her husband were executed by electric chair.

Apparently, Gardner experienced profound shock at his own inaction when Ethel Rosenberg's destiny was decided. Blum (2018: Ch. 20 and Epilogue) describes Gardner's decision to move to England as follows: 'After the execution of the Rosenbergs, he felt a deep guilt that his puzzle-solving had culminated in their deaths. [...] He was eager to leave, to put a physical distance between himself and all the reminders of his complicitous silence' (Location 2354 in the Kindle edition). Perhaps, but why did Gardner move to England? He went to help break codes at the British cryptography and intelligence centre at Cheltenham. Now at least he must have known (if he had not known before) that his own passion for translation and code-breaking might be pure but the same could not be necessarily said of the intentions of those in whose hands he placed his decrypts. Those decrypts were acted upon: spies were identified, some engaged, some, like Julius Rosenberg, executed and at least one, Ethel Rosenberg, executed as it turned out – unjustly. Translators have an ethical responsibility not just in agreeing to undertake work, and not just for executing that work as accurately and sensitively as possible, but also for what becomes of their work: for the uses made of it by their sponsors, especially in war situations where the stakes are so high.

There were not only individuals who suffered as a result of the 'wrong' use of the translations done by the Venona team. The discoveries were used by some FBI workers and politicians like Senator Joseph McCarthy to create the atmosphere that turned out unpalatable even to action-oriented inveterate investigator Lamphere: 'While there were many passionate cold warriors [in the FBI] who could work themselves up into quite a lather about the Red Menace, Bob [Lamphere] never could muster their knee-jerk outrage' (Blum, 2018: Ch. 25). The hysteria into which people like McCarthy whipped the entire society, in Lamphere's opinion, did the opposite of what they intended: such 'approach and tactics hurt the anti-Communist activities in the United States. [...] McCarthy's star chamber proceedings, his lies and overstatements, hurt our counter-intelligence efforts' (ibid.). Translation of the Venona cables on the side of the people like Gardner might have been a pure artform, a butterfly, but this butterfly caused a far-reaching ripple and eventually contributed to a social storm.

Moreover, the storm went beyond just one society. Translation in this intelligence/counterintelligence setting worked not to foster mutual understanding between the interacting parties. The goal was to help one party outfight another. Far from fulfilling its proverbial bridge-building function, translation – always a metaphorical form of code breaking aimed at divining the hidden intentions of the author of the source text for the benefit of the target audience – becomes, in the context of the literal code-breaking of enemy communications, a tool of conflict in which nation is pitted against nation. It is the means by which the hostile other is not only read and understood, but outthought and vanquished.

Although knowledge about the Soviet telegrams as well as about Soviet espionage spy rings had existed both in the USA and the UK before WWII, during the war the USSR was considered an ally. That is why no attempt to decipher the telegrams was made at that time. They were routinely copied in the USA because that was general practice during the war there. Only in 1943 was any effort made to understand what the Soviets talked about secretly. Why in 1943? Because there was a suspicion of betrayal. The chief of the U.S. Army's Special Branch in the War Department's Military Intelligence Division, Colonel Carter Clarke, did not trust the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, whose government had signed the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact and now there were rumours about secret Soviet-German peace negotiations (Mastny, 1979). That is why in 1943 Clarke ordered a team of code breakers to crack the corpus of Soviet cablegrams collected since 1939. The hope was to find out whether Stalin had in fact entered peace negotiations with Germany.

The recruited cryptanalysts and translators did not strive to raise their audience's appreciation of Russian/Soviet culture. Their allegiance was entirely to their employers against an other, formerly amicable but now deemed hostile because it was suspected of betraying the alliance it had formed with their own/adopted country (one of the multiple layers of loyalty and betrayal in the situation we are analysing). This attitude is clearly evidenced by the above cited 'desiatka' note which might have been written by Gardner or somebody like him. An in-depth discussion of the linguistic, sociocultural and historical aspects of the Russian/Soviet message was an effort to help the potential reader learn only what was needed about the other in order to be able to make an informed decision about counteracting that other's hostile actions. If there was an interest on the part of the translator, it was in the form of a cold, unsympathetic gaze, as if through a magnifying glass aimed at a particular feature of the enemy's text.

Of course, the other side harboured similar sentiments: the USSR felt that the ideological divide of 'communism vs. capitalism' should be ignored only temporarily, when there was a common enemy. For the USSR, proof of the precarity of their alliance with the UK and the USA lay in these countries' reluctance to open a Western front against the Axis alliance (Germany, Italy and Japan). That is why the cynical Soviet leadership had no qualms about conspiring against and spying on their allies and stealing their secrets. The USSR was preparing for a war after the war. Peter Wright describes the sentiments of those who discovered the true intentions of the 'ally', the USSR, as follows:

The codebreak had a fundamental effect on Cold War attitudes among those few indoctrinated officers inside the British and American intelligence services. It became the wellspring for the new emphasis on counterespionage investigation which increasingly permeated Western intelligence in the decades after the first break was made. More directly, it showed the worldwide scale of the Soviet espionage attack, at a time when the Western political leadership was apparently pursuing a policy of alliance and extending the hand of friendship. (1987: 185)

Translation in the Venona project contributed to the beginning of what became known as the Cold War. However, as the Venona corpus demonstrates, while recruiting their idealistic informers (later seen as shameful traitors by their Western employers), the Soviet spymasters convinced them that it was only fair that the military secrets of the USA be shared with their Soviet ally. One of the characters of the Venona corpus, David Greenglass, explained to Lamphere that he 'felt it was gross negligence on the part of

the United States not to give Russia information about the Atom Bomb because she was an ally' (Blum, 2018: Ch. 36); the key act of betrayal for Greenglass was thus not his, but that of his devious US employers. Others like Julius Rosenberg ended up spying for the Soviets because they were manipulated into believing that they would help the USSR fight Nazism as part of a universal cause to which anything other than complete loyalty would be the ultimate moral betrayal (ibid.: Ch. 19).

Traduttore Traditore

In the moral quicksand of the wilderness of mirrors, and of the multiple, conflicting layers of Cold War fidelity and betrayal, it is hardly surprising that some would become turncoats. Several of the renegades were hovering around the Venona team, watching over their shoulders, sniffing out what was discovered in order to alert the opposite side.

Given the dilemmas over fidelity and treachery inherent to translation's function in mediating between source and target languages, texts and audiences, it is equally unsurprising that there was at least one translator among the betrayers. His name was William Weisband. Weisband was of Russian extraction. His parents were immigrants from the Russian empire. He retained enough Russian to work with it but also consulted Gardner on some aspects of the Russian language. To add a further layer of complexity to the mix, and in common with many translators, at the level of his personal identity, he behaved as a double agent, dividing his loyalty between the languages and cultural heritages of his parents and those of their adopted country (and on another level, between the new homeland chosen by his biological parents and that of his cultural forefathers). He was employed by the Armed Forces Security Agency as an interpreter and linguist in the Russian Section. From 1945, he assisted cryptographers in several projects and, among them, Venona. His advisory role offered Weisband the mobility to move from section to section and although he was not part of the Venona team, he could learn enough from occasional contacts with the team. He also ingratiated himself with both low- and high-ranking staff, from female typists to the Chief of Production and the Chief of Personnel.

The staff noticed Weisband's rather unusual interest in the progress of the Venona project in general and in the list of atomic scientists compiled as a result of deciphering the Soviet cables in particular. It was only later that Weisband's willingness to assist the Venona team turned out to be least of all an expression of his obedience to the organisation that employed him or of his allegiance to the country that offered him a new home. His interest was of a completely different nature. While helping to translate the Venona cables, he worked for the country – that of his cultural progenitors - whose spies communicated via those telegrams. His involvement in counterespionage activities was only a cover for his own espionage. Gardner might have been naïve but it is hard to describe Weisband's actions as anything other than downright unethical. These were two very different translator profiles in the wilderness of mirrors in which loyalty is reflected back as betrayal and vice versa: the former can be excused as a confused artist while the latter was a treacherous double agent.

How might a spy and, in this case, a translator, square their actions with their conscience, should they feel morally inclined? Perhaps a key reason for justifying one's moral choices in such situations is found in the following interview by the former Russian spy, Andrei Bezrukov. Bezrukov lived and worked in the USA under the name

of Donald Heathfield and was a KGB sleeper agent. When asked how he could live in a country and work against it, he answered that intelligence is defined not by who you work against (Bezrukov, 2018). Rather intelligence is about who you work for. The secret agent works to bring good to his/her fatherland. A crime is *against* somebody, but intelligence is a patriotic activity. The etymological link between patriotism and paternity is no coincidence; in Heathfield/Bezrukov's case, the country to which he thought he owed his undying love and ultimate loyalty was that of his forefathers.

It is not known exactly how extensively Weisband informed the Soviet side about the discoveries made in the Venona project, but it seems that he might have been among the first, if not the first, to tip off Soviet intelligence about the fact that their cables were being deciphered. Yet there were limits in what Weisband could achieve as a 'roving' translation and linguistics expert. That is why the task was picked up by another Soviet spy who enjoyed better access to the Venona project – the infamous Kim Philby whose loyalty was determined not by his forefathers but by a commitment to a universal, transnational communist cause (though he was seen by his own country as having betrayed it to a hostile Soviet state). Gardner, when in Britain, told Peter Wright 'how a young pipe-smoking Englishman named Philby used to regularly visit him and peer over his shoulder and admire the progress he was making' (Wright 1987: 185).

Weisband's hypocritical enthusiasm and actual subversion of the project might have had another, autobiographical reason. It is believed that he was mentioned in the Venona corpus under the codename LINK. There was a message dated 23 June 1943, which was fully translated only in 1979, long after Weisband's death in 1967, in which the agent LINK's profile recalled the profile of Weisband (West 1999: 41). LINK, like Weisband, studied Italian in Arlington Hall, in the headquarters of the Armed Forces Security Agency in the US. At some point LINK, like Weisband, travelled by ship to London. The password used by a Soviet handler when contacting LINK contained the name 'Bill', Weisband's first name. Finally, both LINK and Weisband spoke Russian. This was strong circumstantial evidence, but it took another Soviet spy, Jones Orin York, to identify Weisband as a Soviet spy to the FBI (ibid.: 44). Whether Weisband knew about the message containing information on him is unclear, but it is very likely that he might have expected something of the kind and that this was another motive behind his willingness to learn more about the Venona project. Thus, the 'visibility' of the translator as active and enthusiastic interpreter of the hidden intentions of the hostile other for the benefit of the target audience to which s/he commits undivided loyalty can prove deceptive. For such loyalty is prone to being superseded at another level by covert fidelity to that very hostile other, whether through reasons of biography and linguistic/cultural identity, or out of ideological, or even ethical, choice. If the C(I) translator is prone to double agency, then this is true, too, of translation *per se*. Regardless of native language, and paradoxically in the C(I) context, translators empathise with, and internalise the intentions and meanings of, the author of the source text.

Conclusion

C(I) translators behave differently from those operating in other contexts, yet also capture an essential feature of translation in general. Translation is always practiced in a world of confused identities, divided loyalties and competing ethical imperatives. Translation is also practised on the premise that someone lacks essential knowledge, placing the commissioner at a vulnerable disadvantage, and opening a window for

opportunists to take advantage. Translation in the (counter)intelligence context brings these issues into sharp focus, compounding them to the extent that it begins to resemble a compass near a powerful magnet: the needle which should point unflinchingly to the North Pole loses its bearings and begins to oscillate uncontrollably.

Many aspects of translation in the (C)I context are inclined to deviate from standard practice. Translation may deal with highly unusual source texts, generating similarly non-standard target texts. Where normally translators embed the justification for their creative decisions imperceptibly within the main body of the target text itself, a (C)I target text will often expose the translator's presence, reflecting his/her logic in an extensive corpus of notes and comments. Here, translation appears to abandon its status as an invisible act of mediation aimed at bridging the divide between two equally valued languages and cultures and to ally itself overtly and unashamedly with the language and culture of the target text in their battle with a hostile other.

The (C)I translator's work is fraught with the danger of making mistakes that incur potentially grave consequences. This explains the preference for precision and for literalness over idiomaticity. Paradoxically, then, greater 'fidelity' to the source text in Venuti's understanding of that term is motivated not, as usual, by deference to its authors, but by hostility, and by the desire to prevail over those authors. Translations in the Venona corpus are supplied with notes and comments ensuring the reader's, i.e., the (C)I decision-maker's, fullest and most nuanced understanding of the text they read. Thus, translation combines forces with cryptanalysis in a manner which brings to the fore translation's metaphorical status as a form of creative 'code breaking'. Yet in the case of literal code breaking, there is little room for creativity and still less for error which may cost human lives, as tragically happened with Gardner's misinterpretation of Ethel Rosenberg's role. Being accurate here carries an almost unbearably onerous ethical burden.

Translators in the C(I) world inevitably start playing according to the rules of a new game. The mediation bound up with translation loses its double meaning as both 'facilitating communication' and 'bridging the barriers of difference that separate conflicting parties'. As C(I) mediators, translators intently study and learn about the other, not out of a desire for empathetic understanding, but in order to maintain that other at a distance. The other is not contemplated up close with affection in order to be appreciated, but rather gazed at with deep suspicion through a seemingly unshatterable glass wall of difference. The goal is to learn as much as possible in order to prevent the other from gaining the upper hand in an interstate rivalry in which the stakes are literally those of life and death.

The world of (counter)espionage is thus a world in which there can be no unqualified trust between/among the interacting parties. This causes translation, like any other activity in such contexts, to operate within questionable situations. Allegiances are put to the ultimate test. For C(I) translators this presents particular challenges, intensifying the ethical dilemmas; they must remember that they are not neutral, bridge-building 'mediators'; but rather warriors dedicated to the party and the cause to which they have pledged undying allegiance. Yet precisely because their professional practice requires them to have 'feet in both camps' (mediation and translation are, after all, inextricably tied), C(I) translators must constantly face the temptations – and the dangers – of double agency. Over-zealous interpretation of allegiance to a sponsor in the interests of the ideological certitude of single agency can lead to fateful error and the death of innocents, as was the case with Meredith Gardner. Yet double agency on behalf of an

‘enemy’ to whom one’s covert patriotic commitment is that of the son to the language and culture of his distant forefathers leads to treachery and moral turpitude of the basest kind. Such was the case of William Weisband. The complex and conflicting layers of fidelity and betrayal, sincerity and deceit, selfhood and otherness, identity and difference to be negotiated by the translator within counter-intelligence reveals translation itself to be entangled in the ethical web of double agency.

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Appendix 1.

https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/dated/1941/10aug_barch_mtg.pdf

(Also: Benson and Warner 1996: 201–2)

Reference No: ...

Issued : date

Copy No:

1. BARCh's MEETING
2. FUCHS AND PROBABLE REFERENCE TO ATOMIC ENERGY PROJECT

From: London

To: Moscow

No: ...

10th August 1941

To DIRECTOR

On 8th August BARCh [i] had a meeting with [a former acquaintance], Doctor FUCHS [FUKS] [a], who [1 group unrecovered] [b] that

[10 groups unrecovered]

[in] [c] BIRMINGHAM [ii]

[34 groups unrecovered]

[in] three months [time] and then all the material [d] will be sent to CANADA for industrial production [e] [.] [1 group unrecovered] [f] the fact that in GERMANY, in LEIPZIG [LEJPTsIG] [g]

[9 groups unrecovered]

Professor HEISENBERG [KhEJSENBURG] [iii]

[34 groups unrecovered]

1000 tons of dynamite.

(Report when opportunity occurs [DOKLAD OKAZIEJ]. [h])

No. 400

BRION [iv]

Notes

[a] The following is an alternative reading: ‘... had a meeting with [a former acquaintance] of Doctor Fuchs who...’

On technical grounds there is nothing to choose between these two versions. Without collateral it is impossible to say which is the correct one.

[b] It appears from the two previous occurrences of this group that the general sense is ‘said’.

[c] Inserted by the translator. The case ending indicates that the preposition ‘in’ must precede ‘BIRMINGHAM’.

[d] It is almost certain that this means ‘papers’, ‘documents’, etc.

[e] This is a literal translation. The sense is probably: ‘...will be sent to CANADA so that industrial methods may be used.’

It is known from collateral that laboratory facilities were found to be inadequate and that the decision was taken to use industrial plant.

[f] There is some evidence that the value of this group is: 'Draws attention to'

[g] The structure of the sentence suggests that LEIPZIG should be an adjective and that the passage should read: '... in the LEIPZIG...' However the adjectival ending has been tried without success.

[h] This is an elliptical expression which it is exceedingly hard to interpret without the full context. 'OKAZIEJ', or more correctly 'S OKAZIEJ', is equivalent to the French 'à l'occasion'. To send a report or letter 'S OKAZIEJ' means to send it when the opportunity arises. 'DOKLAD OKAZIEJ' thus suggests that a report was to be sent when an opportunity for sending one arose. If so, the report was presumably to be sent in writing. (BRION could have signalled a report at any time and need not have waited for suitable opportunity.)

Comments:

[i] BARCh: Simon Davidovich KREMER.

[ii] FUCHS moved to BIRMINGHAM on 27th May 1941 and took up his research duties on the following day.

[iii] HEISENBERG: Professor Werner HEISENBERG who was Professor of Theoretic Physics at LEIPZIG University 1927–1941.

[iv] BRION: Lt. Col. I.A. SKLYaROV.