
Douglas Robinson. *Becoming a Translator: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Translation*. London: Routledge, 2003, 301 pp.

Douglas Robinson's *Becoming a Translator: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Translation* fuses translation theory with information about the practicalities of translating. The title itself clearly mentions both theory and practice as an introduction to the author's personal process of becoming a translator.

Douglas Robinson was born in 1954 in Lafayette, Indiana where his father was studying for a Master's degree in physics at Purdue. He grew up in Los Angeles and Seattle and later moved to Finland for 14 years as a student. Upon his return to the United States in 1981, he completed his Ph.D. in English at the

University of Washington and later was hired as a critical theory professor in the English department of the University of Wisconsin. Robinson has written many books on the subject of translation, including: *Translation and Taboo* (1996), *What Is Translation? Centrifugal Theories, Critical Interventions* (1997) and *Who Translates? Translator Subjectivities Beyond Reason* (2001).

Douglas Robinson describes this study as "an integral part of the explosion of both intercultural relations and the transmission of scientific and technological knowledge." Robinson explores how to best bring student translators up to speed in the literal sense of helping them to learn and to translate rapidly and effectively. He wants students to attain the linguistic and cultural knowledge that it takes to become an effective translator and wants them to master the learning and translation skills they will need as professionals. He calls

these ideas “rapid subliminal translating” (linguistic knowledge) and “slow, painstaking critical analysis” (cultural knowledge). Robinson states that “translators need to be able to shuttle back and forth” between these, and that “their training should embody the shuttle movement between the two, subliminal-becoming-analytical, analytical-becoming-subliminal.”

As a result, *Becoming a Translator* is essentially split into two parts comprised of eleven chapters in addition to the introduction. The first part, chapters 1-5, offers practical information and is crucial to the development of this book in that it gives the reader a literal understanding of translation. According to Robinson: “there is no substitute for practical experience – to learn how to translate one must translate, translate, translate.” The second part, chapters 6-11, offers ways of integrating a series of theoretical perspectives with the practice of translation.

In chapter 1 “External knowledge: the user’s view,” Robinson discusses reliability in translation, whether it is textual reliability or translator reliability. He also focuses on having sensitivity to the

client’s needs. In chapter 2 “Internal knowledge: the translator’s view,” he focuses on professional pride and mentions the fact that most translators “enjoy their work.” Here, Robinson refers to translators as “voracious and omnivorous readers.” Chapter 3 “the translator as a learner,” focuses on the distinction between independent and dependent learners in relation to translation. Robinson mentions the fact that “we all learn in different ways, and institutional learning should therefore be as flexible and as complex and rich as possible, so as to activate the channels through which each student learns best.” Chapter 4, “the process of translation,” has to do with the idea of translation being subliminal, citing the works of Charles Sanders Peirce and Karl Weick. Robinson states “the translator is at once a professional for whom complex mental processes have become second nature (and thus subliminal), and a *learner* who must constantly face and solve new problems in conscious analytical ways.” Chapter 5 “Experience,” describes how a good translator can never have quite experienced enough translation in his/her life. This chapter also provides an extensive and comical list

of mistranslations, such as: a sign in the office of a Roman doctor that reads: "Specialist in women and other diseases," a sign at a Tokyo bar that says: "Special cocktails for the ladies with nuts," or a sign on a Rome laundry store that reads: "Ladies, leave your clothes here and spend the afternoon having a good time."

The second half of the book (chapters 6-11) focuses more on theoretical perspectives. Chapter 6, "People," treats the following point: "a person-centered approach to any text, language, or culture will always be more productive and effective than a focus on abstract linguistic structures or cultural conventions." He uses the story of a couple in which the husband is a North American English speaker and the wife is an Argentinean Spanish speaker. He mentions that they both speak English together at home because the wife is more fluent in it than the husband in Spanish and explains the difficulty that she has when her husband calls her "silly." This is because she has learned that the word "silly" means stupid, foolish and ridiculous, while her husband uses it in an affectionate way meaning funny, genial and pleasantly child-

like. Chapter 7, "Working people," argues that translators can translate texts in professional fields for which they lack the formal qualifications. Robinson says: "most translators just fake it, working on no job experience and perhaps little reading in the field." He thinks "faking it" is an effective way to get the jobs that need to be translated. Chapter 8 "Languages," focuses on the fact that linguistics should be downplayed in translation studies. Robinson believes that: "A useful way of thinking about translation and language is that translators don't translate words; they translate what people do with words." In chapter 9, "Social networks," Robinson argues that people become translators by pretending to already be one. Chapter 10, "Cultures," focuses on cultural awareness and knowledge when it comes to translation and the fact that some words or phrases are "so heavily grounded in one culture that they are almost impossible to translate into the terms – verbal or otherwise – of another." And finally, chapter 11, "When habit fails," concludes with the importance of being able to analyze a source text linguistically and culturally. Robinson says, "transla-

tion is an intelligent activity requiring constant growth, learning and self expression.”

Becoming a Translator will help students learn how to translate faster and more accurately as well as how to deal with potential problems. An invaluable resource for novice and practicing transla-

tors, it is also a very readable book for those who are new to the field of translation. Robinson uses real life examples in his study and shows how translation is an integral part of intercultural relations and the transmissions of scientific knowledge.

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