

ANTHONY PYM

The Moving Text. Localization, translation and distribution. Amsterdam /

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For some years now, translation theorist and educator Anthony Pym has been trying to establish a dialogue between the academic tradition he comes from and the world of the language industries into which he is meant to introduce his students: in other words, between the Translation Studies discipline and the localisation sector.

This rapprochement is also the stated aim of his new book *The Moving Text* (p. 159). Rather than collect and synthesise what was previously dispersed over several articles, Pym has rewritten his material completely, both literally and conceptually, all in the light of the more than three decades of research he has conducted into the field of cross-cultural communication. The theoretical arguments are ably supported by a few short but telling and well-exploited examples.

The book opens with a detailed exploration of what Pym calls *market-driven translation theory*, and points out the narrowness of the definition that global industry offers of 21st century translation – a simple “replacement of natural language strings” in localisation projects (p 52). This new world of Globalisation, Internationalisation, Localisation, Translation (or GILT for the initiated) has its own language and agenda, and Pym’s description of it should interest not just academics specialising in language and cross-cultural transfer, but anyone who has wondered how global communication is evolving.

As in any dialectic, there are some interesting conflicts and paradoxes. For example, we are now at a point where Translation Studies has broadened the concept of translation (and reduced the importance of the concept of equivalence) so as to encompass summarization, adaptation, and all those areas localisation now claims for itself. For the GILT sector however, translation remains a simple linguistic problem –

just another component (and an outsourced and poorly paid one at that) in a complex workflow including project management, adaptation, quality assurance, re-engineering and testing.

Pym links this paradox (or irony perhaps) with another equally salient one: namely, that precisely now when text linguistics and discourse analysis are helping us understand how the different pieces of flowing, “linear” composition fit together, digital text is becoming “chunky”. Here the author brings in his previous research on translation history to point out how, in a way, the digital landscape now resembles the pre-print, pre-Modern paradigm of unstable (source) text, perpetually idling in edit mode.

This shift, which began from a need for the type of discrete, self-contained “info-bites” associated with computer help files, is now driven by the imperatives of paragraph-based, xml-tagged single-source writing. In texts where deictics have been largely displaced by hyperlinks (p. 195), we can readily see that changes wrought by the digitalization of information are not just cosmetic ones.

Nor does Pym neglect the impact of this shift on us all as readers. Much has been made of the fact that these days, thanks to translation memory, translators need never translate the same sentence twice; now, with single sourcing, writers need never write the same sentence twice. This is well and good, but - as Pym reminds us - readers (sorry, “end-users”) must consequently cope with that disorienting feeling of having to *read* the same sentence twice... and more (p. 186).

This self-replicating sameness is a theme of underlying unease - and also implies another paradox: localisation rather than enhancing diversity restricts it. As English affirms itself as the *lingua franca* of production, other languages are relegated to the localised dissemination of product marketing based on the English template. The localised product may have “the look and feel of locally made” ones (as Pym quotes Fry in p. 46), and Windows may offer twenty different “locales” just for Spanish, but the internationalisation straight-jacket rules the whole process, as best exemplified by the fact that no matter which locale they occupy, users still have to press the same key (p. 55).

Which brings us to a theme I found thought-provoking: raising the banner of cultural ecology against current dominant market economy, Pym would demand the GILT industry to address cultures rather than locales, to limit the overuse of controlled language aimed at filling marketing-driven internationalised kernels in favour of

messages embedded in all the richness - synonymy, metaphor, connotation, overlapping, superimposing - of natural language. For Pym, the individual should be treated not just as a block in a Lego set, with a fixed and passive “user” role, but something rather like a chess king who, apart from occupying an individual slot, dynamically exercises influence through the adjacent spaces (p. 59).

The main point of the book seems to be this: text is propagated in our global economy through “distribution”, multiplied by the technological advances and corresponding reduction of costs in transport and communication. Distribution across cultures is facilitated by internationalisation and carried out through localisation. If, instead of the present, narrow paradigm, the Language Industry adopts the lessons learned in the last decades through Translation Studies and Pym’s own take on the ethics of cooperation, and applies both through a “humanising” approach that addresses people in cultures rather than end-users in locales, the future will be a better place.

For Pym, “humanisation” is not a facile exercise of “plain language” technical writing using the grammatical second person and avoiding jargon, as the more “sophisticated” *I10n* projects already tend to do now. Instead, and more importantly, it means a move back from the disjunction of “chunkiness” to a more fluid pedagogical progression through which readers, now in a role of passive consumers, can master the new language of technology, and have the chance to become active producers as well.

The Moving Text will certainly attract the attention of translation theorists: its arguments are too significant to miss. But will it register with the GILT sector? There’s no reason why not: the two key concepts put forward by Pym - a more symmetric *D10n* and a *H10n* propelled by loads of “rational egoism” - should be attractive supplements to its standard *G11n*, *I18n* and *L10n* diet. Hope to see them on the menu some time soon.