Translation Theory

In recent years, translation studies have moved beyond the process of converting one language into another. With new technologies blurring distinctions between the “original” and its reproductions, and with globalization redefining national and cultural boundaries, "translation" is now emerging as a reformulated subject of lively, interdisciplinary debate. Our course enters these debates with an overview of translation studies through the figure of the Tower of Babel, focusing on key concepts and terms: translatability and untranslatability; fidelity and adaptation; languages, dialects and Creoles. Weekly units thereafter include: 1. how translation connects to the study of language through historical and structural linguistics and 2. how translation studies have intersected with several different fields, most prominently, anthropology, comparative literature and postcolonial studies. Our case studies will focus on translation in the Americas, posing the question of what’s different about translation in an Americas context. Special attention to the interfaces between translation and colonialism will help to bring into view the asymmetrical power relations that have always determined the practice of translation at the same time that they have underestimated the translator's role in the formation of cultures and the constitution of identities. Our aim is to make the translated text a subject of academic study for each student, in the spirit of Walter Benjamin's analysis of translation as an intellectual activity in its own right.

Course Texts and Readings (available at BayTree bookstore)
Selected articles will be sent to you via email [see E below for selections]

Class
Each unit of study will consist of a theoretical discussion, a historical analysis and a study of a text and some of its translations. The assigned readings will be discussed in section; section attendance is therefore mandatory. Lectures will be easier to follow if the assigned readings are done in advance. For our cases studies of texts and translations, knowledge of the original language of the texts is not presumed.

Written Work/Evaluation
Four Weekly Reader Responses 10% of the final grade each; one final project (6-8 pages): 40% of the final grade; engagement in lecture and section: 20% of final grade.

For the final project, you have the choice of ONE of two options:

Option #1: select a short text (1-2 pages of prose; 8-14 lines of verse; a brief film sequence, etc). and 3 translations of it (2 of them may be inter-semiotic). Analyze and compare the translations, focusing on the theories that they evince, either implicitly or explicitly. You will not be expected to evaluate the translation or to substitute your own, but rather to discuss the translation in terms of its underlying theory.

Option #2: select a text and translate it. Support your translation with a detailed theoretical and analytical discussion.

Schedule of Readings
I. Translation Studies: State of the Field

Week #1 (July 28th & 31st)
Overview/Keywords: translatability/untranslatability; fidelity/betrayal

Translation and Linguistics I: philosophy and history of language
- Venuti, Chapter 23 (Kwame Anthony Appiah)
- Venuti, Chapter 27 (David Damrosch)

Week #2 (August 4th & 7th)
Translation and Linguistics II: structuralism, post-structuralism
- Venuti, Chapter 11 (Roman Jakobson)
- Venuti, Chapter 25 (Jacques Derrida)

Translation and Linguistics III: language theory
- Venuti, Chapter 7 (Walter Benjamin)
- Venuti, Chapter 12 (Eugene Nida)
- Venuti, Chapter 15 (Gideon Toury)

II. The Translation Turn: Translation Studies and Other Fields in the Americas

Week #3 (August 11th & 14th)
Anthropology/Ethnography/Cultural Studies
- James Clifford, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (Harvard UP, 1997) [E]
- Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (Routledge, 1992) [E]

Postcolonial/Empire Studies
- Venuti, Chapter 22 (Gayatri Spivak)
- Vicente L. Rafael, The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines (Duke UP, 2005) [E]
Week #4 (August 18th &21st)

**Comparative Literature and the Culture of Our America**

- Venuti, Chapter 9 (Jorge Luis Borges)

**American Babel**

- Wai Chee Dimock, “African, Carribean, American: Black English as Creole Tongue,” in *Shades of the Planet* [E]

Week #5 (August 25th & 28th)

**Translation, Identity, Invisibility**

- Venuti, Chapter 21 (Annie Brisset)
- Venuti, Chapter 24 (Keith Harvey)

**Provisional conclusions: Language, Translation, Community**

- Venuti, Chapter 31