2

TRANSLATION

The standard view of translation contends that a translation must preserve meaning, or at least extension, as much as possible. As I noted in the previous chapter, however, this requirement is in many cases too strict and must be relaxed and replaced by the condition that there be syntactic and semantic transformations that work together in a systematic way. As I also remarked, this generalized, nonstandard notion of translation has a predecessor in mathematical logic where it is called 'interpretation'. Some reconstructed forms of reduction in the philosophy of science also satisfy this condition. However, in the present chapter I try to point out that the nonstandard notion of translation has its roots in everyday discourse, where it functions implicitly. We saw that what Kuhn (1970) says about revolutionary change in science shows that he, too, possibly had elements of such a notion of translation available but he did not put them together. Kuhn is not very precise, however, and, furthermore, in his later work turns his attention to the standard notion, so one cannot be certain about his intentions here.

It is more important to notice here, that if we study these implicit sources of the nonstandard notion of translation, everyday communication and Kuhn's earlier work, we shall better understand how logical aspects of intertheoretic, intertextual, and intercultural relations are associated with contextual, paradigmatic, and hermeneutic aspects. Some aspects of contextual, paradigmatic, and hermeneutic kinds must even be made explicit when such relations are modelled, whereas others rather function as guiding principles. This is particularly obvious in some cases of conceptual change in which communication breakdowns occur and in cases in which the understanding of the other's position presupposes a kind of explanation that does not match any traditional notions of explanation. I start by studying translation and interpretation in ordinary discourse, and in later chapters

enlarge what is established here to more theoretical contexts.

2.1. PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

I shall consider interpretation and translation in terms of speech acts since this may enable one to see more clearly crucial pragmatic and intentional features of translation and, in particular, how these are associated with semantic and logical aspects. The notion of speech act is here, and especially in the subsequent chapters, to be understood in a generalized sense: the two parties of a speech act, a speaker and hearer, can be individuals or even (scientific or cultural) communities and the speaker's utterances can be spoken or written texts – even theories and artworks. If, for instance, a theory is accepted by a scientific community, that is, belongs to a scientific paradigm in something like the Kuhnian sense of the word, it can be considered as an utterance in a particular occasion where it, due to being an object of study, exemplifies some of its properties, to borrow this well-known notion from Goodman (1968). I shall have more to say about speech acts in connection with literary works and theories in Chapter 3.

Studying how interpretation emerges from reception makes it obvious that an interpretation on which a translation is based is more or less implicitly guided by certain principles whose function is to increase a hearer's understanding of a speaker's position and this way to close the gap between the positions of the two. The first of them is well known, since it has been much discussed in the literature in the context of Davidson's (1973) notion of radical interpretation. Therefore, I shall call it the *Davidsonian principle.* According to Wheeler (1978), for example, a radical interpretation is such that the hearer interprets a speech act as being as much as possible like the speech act he would make in similar circumstances. Hence, the hearer is trying to maximize agreement, which, as it is said, is tantamount to maximizing the rationality of the other. At least on Wheeler's construal of Davidson's theory, this is because the hearer assumes that the speaker's attitudes are the ones he would have in a similar situation, and in like manner Davidson himself says that the hearer starts interpreting by assuming general agreement on beliefs. General agreement means here something that functions as a background which enables one to engage interpretation but which makes disagreement in particular oc-

casions possible.

A similar position is assumed by some cognitive scientists. Dennett (1978), for instance, suggests that when we study the behavior of an intentional system, we start by assuming rationality. But this rationality is *our* notion of rationality. The presumption of rationality is so strongly established in our inference habits that we do not easily question the overall rationality of the system under study. This is, in other words, one's methodological starting point, but since exceptions are characteristic of intentional systems, intentionality does not always go together with ideal rationality, and one has to tolerate less than optimal performance, according to Dennett.

Important differences notwithstanding, it is evident that the philosophy which lies behind the positions of the kind which Davidson and Dennett represent, and which obviously comes from Aristotle, is the philosophy on which many literary theorists base their approaches to the interpretation of fiction. Ricoeur (1992), for example, argues that the significance of a narrative derives from the "intersection" of the world of the text and the world of the reader, that is, narrative understanding is anchored in living experience. This implies that the gap between fiction and life must be kept to a minimum when interpreting narratives. Lewis (1978), in turn, proposes that the body of beliefs to be used as the background for interpreting a story consists of the beliefs that are overt in the community of the origin of the story. All these positions cited above are much more sophisticated and complex than what I am able to quote here, but as a basic premise, they all regard the interpreter's or the hearer's side as the methodological starting point of understanding.

The second principle of interpretation, which I shall call the *minimization principle*, applies in contexts where a hearer starts the interpretation process by observing or believing that a speaker's utterances are (from the hearer's point of view) false or otherwise mistaken or inappropriate, or involve concepts not available and hence ineffable in the speaker's culture or ineffable in literal terms. However, even though an utterance is an expression of the speaker's attitudes, concepts, or truth conditions that are at least seemingly different from those of the hearer, the latter makes the gap as small as possible in order to understand, and possibly explain, the speaker's position. He may strive to understand the utterance by looking to the speaker's

position. In other words, the minimization principle is functioning when the gap is minimized, not because the hearer assumes overall similarity of beliefs but *in spite of* assuming their dissimilarity. The direction of minimizing the gap is then opposite to the direction that results when the Davidsonian principle is applied. As we shall see from examples to follow, in some cases an effort to minimize the gap in this sense requires counterfactual thinking. Understanding is often successful only if the interpreter is ready to change, at least tentatively, his position so as to make assumptions or thought experiments that are contrary-to-fact by his lights. The minimization principle is appropriate in contexts where the notion of translation is taken in a nonstandard sense and where it is of explanatory import.

If it is the Davidsonian principle that enables one to engage in a process of interpretation in the first place, then it seems to follow that the minimization principle depends on it, and becomes applicable only after the former has done its work. While the former principle can be active independently of whether or not one is aware of it, that is, it functions in any case, it seems likely that to apply the latter presupposes a conscious effort. Be this as it may, it is natural to think of the principles as providing two basic components for a dialogue, even though their applications may not be separable in practice. Often they work as a starting point so as to enable one to engage in interpretation but become mixed during a dialogue, so that their applications provide phases in a hermeneutic process of interpreting. The principle saying that they are repeatedly applied and combined to give rise to a process in which the positions of the two parties approach each other, will be called here the *dialogue principle*. In a sense, then, this principle can be seen as a mixture of the first two principles, from which it follows that later on these principles play a dominant role.

If we add to the minimization principle appropriate proposals concerning the role of tradition in Gadamer's (1960) sense of tradition, as, for example, to the effect that assumptions an interpreter makes to make the gap smaller by means of the minimization principle tend to modify his tradition, that is, change the interpreter's position permanently, then the minimization principle in such an augmented sense has something to do with Gadamer's notion of agreement or consensus in interpretation. Then Gadamer's position can be seen as analogous to the combination of the Davidsonian and minimization prin-

ciples, that is, the dialogue principle. But if the assumptions are just temporary counterfactual thought experiments and do not imply that the interpreter seriously reconsiders his previous position, his applications of the dialogue principle cannot be regarded as resulting in a dialogue in something like Gadamer's sense.

The three principles of minimizing the gap can also be characterized in terms of Hacking's (1993) theorizing on the spectator-oriented nature of translation, which was outlined in the preceding chapter. First, it seems obvious, in general, that the minimization principle provides a more spectator-oriented basis for translation than the others. It is often applied consciously as a methodological tool, and at least in cases where a translator evokes imaginary situations to make some counterfactual thought experiments, it is difficult to imagine that he could "live" such situations; or, to apply another expression of Hacking's, when the speaker belongs to a culture that is alien to the hearer, the latter agent cannot "speak" that culture while projecting the terms of his own culture.[1]

As we shall see later, in Chapter 5, the minimization principle, once it has been generalized so as to be relevant for speech acts in the generalized sense referred to above, is prominent in cases of limiting case correspondence. There we shall be dealing with translations between scientific theories, and therefore Hacking's criticism is directly applicable. However, its force here and elsewhere is dependent, e.g., upon the status of the old science in relation to the new one during the historical period one is talking about, and upon how radical the scientific change in question was. In many cases where a limiting case correspondence is currently claimed to obtain, even though an old science is superseded by a new one in the Kuhnian sense of scientific revolution, scientists are trained to speak the old and the new science equally well. In this sense, the relation of classical mechanics and relativistic mechanics, for example, is completely different from that of modern science and Paracelsus. In the former case, Hacking's criticism misses the point.

On the other hand, a translation based on the Davidsonian principle of interpretation is only slightly spectator-oriented since its application means that the hearer starts interpreting by taking, consciously or not, the speaker's speech act as being like a speech act he would make in similar circumstances, that is, by assuming general agreement on be-