

Hebrew and Translation Issues NEJS 145A — Brandeis University

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..... Overview

The task of translation offers an unparalleled opportunity to understand a language and texts written in it, because nuances that remain hidden to a casual observer — levels of meaning, minor word-order variation, idioms and metaphors, allusions, register distinctions, puns, and much more — are all brought to the fore during the course of translation.

Starting with overviews of translation and literary criticism, and then a survey of Hebrew and its unique elements, we will investigate and translate Hebrew from three different periods of History: Ancient Hebrew, Medieval Hebrew, and Modern Hebrew. We will work as a class evaluating possible English renditions and devising translation for discussion. Our conversations will yield insight into the intricacies of how Hebrew works, as well as how it has changed over time, and even a better understanding of English, and how languages in general differ.

By the end of the semester, you will better appreciate the complexities of language, and understand how those complexities are expressed in Hebrew.

..... Topics

The course begins with an overview of its three key theoretical aspects: elements of translation, theories about text and language, and the unique aspects of Hebrew. From there, we move on to translate works from at least three different periods of Hebrew. (The works are chosen to suit the interests of the members of the class.)

Translation.

Five levels of translation — sounds, words, sentences, concepts and affect — can be identified, and often translating one means not translating another. What does each level entail? When is

each most important? How do we identify the content of each level in Hebrew, and how do we decide which to translate? Finally, how do we translate each from Hebrew?

Language and Text.

Some modern literary critics tell us that a text, or at least some texts, are incomplete without a reader. But more generally, language has many purposes, only one of which is simple conveyance of information. We will take a brief look at how texts work, and what we need to know in order to translate them.

Hebrew.

While all languages share the same basic building blocks, the way those blocks are assembled differs from language to language. To properly understand (and so to properly translate) Hebrew we must understand the unique elements of Hebrew, and how they function. What does word order convey? What are the ramifications of a “root-based” system of words? Why do loan words convey more force than historic words? What role does Biblical Hebrew play in the modern language?

Finally, how do different periods of Hebrew differ, and what must we do to avoid the mistake of interpreting ancient Hebrew according to the patterns of Modern Hebrew, for example, or *vice versa*?

Projects.

Armed with an understanding of all of the elements of translation, we will set out to translate Hebrew from at least three different periods, looking in detail at how the language works, and in so doing learning much more about Hebrew, and even about language and English.

The students will help choose the projects, so that in addition to studying Hebrew and how it is best translated, students will get an in-depth look at texts of their choosing.

.....Requirements.....

Because much of the course will consist of class discussion and evaluation of translations, and because the remainder of the class — lectures about translation, Hebrew, and where those two meet — is not available in printed form, you should plan on attending every class. If you must miss a class, you will want to make sure to obtain class notes from someone else.

Your grade in the class will depend upon a final translation project and a few small written assignments during the semester. Students may work on these projects in small groups.

.....Other Matters.....

Contact Information

You can reach me most conveniently by e-mail: JMH@Huc.Edu. You can also reach me by phone: 617/679-9861. You can call as early as you like, but *please don't call after 9:00pm*.

Work Integrity

Each assignment you receive will have its own set of rules regarding what or whom you can use for resources. Rarely, you will have to work entirely alone. For most assignments, you will be working in small groups and will be able to use any outside resource that's not alive. For some assignments, you can use any resource you want.

I will explain the rules of each assignment as I distribute it. Please make sure you understand them before you start working.

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

.....Selected Bibliography.....

Most of the course consists of class lectures, handouts and discussions. However, the following are used to greater or lesser degrees during the course, either to supplant or to reinforce material presented in class.

Of these, the books most worth having on your bookshelf are marked with an asterisk (*). Those most relevant to the course are marked with a plus symbol (+).

Eco, Umberto. 1992. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge, England.

Eco, Umberto. 1994. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge, MA. (*)

Even-Shoshan, Avraham. 1993. המלון העברי המרכז [hamilon ha'ivri ham'rukaz]. Jerusalem. (*+)

Hirsch, A. 1967. *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven.

Hofstadter, Douglas R. *Le Ton beau de Marot*. New York. (*+)

Klein, Ernest. 1987. *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*. New York. (*)

Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. Chicago.

Lefevere, André. 1975. *Translating Poetry*. The Netherlands. (+)

Lefevere, André. 1992. *Translating Literature*. New York. (+)

Malone, Joseph L. 1988. *The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation*. Albany, New York.

Newmark, Peter. 1988. *Textbook of Translation*. New York.

Pinker, Steven. 1995. *The Language Instinct*. New York. (*)

Putnam, Hilary. 1988. *Representation and Reality*. (*) Cambridge, MA

Sáenz-Badillos, Angel. 1993. *A History of the Hebrew Language*. J. Elwolde, trans. Great Britain. (+*)

Snell-Hornby, Mary. 1995. *Translation Studies*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia.

Steiner, George. 1992. *After Babel*. Oxford. (+)