

## TRANSLATING THEORY

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Office hours by appointment

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course has two main aims: 1) to give students an intensive introduction to reading French, with the aim of becoming proficient enough to read theoretical texts in the original with the aid of a dictionary; 2) to begin to practice the translation of texts from French into English, with an awareness of not only technical issues such as word choice and syntax but more theoretical ones such as translatability itself.

To achieve the first aim, the course will work through fundamental aspects of French--grammar, vocabulary, etc. In due course, we will seek to use theoretical texts written in French as practice material.

To achieve the second, we will select passages from contemporary French theory and work on translating them, step by step: from an initial draft to a reworking, concentrating on the fluency of the translation, to a revision as we re-read the translation with French original, to a further revision of the English for still greater fluency and attention to idiom. And so on—again and again.

Our attention in these exercises will be on the process and practice of translation, which will require as much attention to the quality of our English as it will to the accuracy of our French. We will explore the more technical aspects—but also the theory—of translation by reading published translations—sometimes competing ones—alongside the French or (where students are sufficiently proficient) other languages. Finally, we will read some key works on the theory of translation—and wherever possible, we will read these in the original and in translation(s)—from, for instance, Benjamin, Derrida, Venuti, and others.

### ASSIGNMENTS

#### *Participation and Short Exercises (20%)*

Throughout the semester, I will ask you to contribute to the class in a number of ways. You might, for example, contribute theoretical vocabulary to a list compiled for the class—words, phrases, expressions, that you have come upon in your reading and that will serve the entire class. You might share a text for the class to begin to translate together as a group. And there will be short assignments to work on in order to work on the basics (and more than basics) of French and translating from French into English.

#### *Translation and Commentary (30%)*

A translation of a short, previously unpublished theoretical text, written in French, of your choosing. The text you translate should be at least 2 pages (approximately 500 words) and no more than 5 pages (about 1,250 words) in length. Submit the sample you intend to translate for

approval at least two weeks before the due date.

The translation is to be accompanied by:

- A glossary—a list of key words and phrases, giving the French and the English you chose to render. Here, might briefly comment upon alternative translations and why you rejected them in favour of the words you used.
- A short paper reflecting on the translation: what kinds of challenges did it pose? How did those challenges reflect upon the translation process? How did they speak to the text itself, the kinds of difficulties it poses, the possibilities it offers, even in French. Finally, what did these challenges and possibilities say about what the text is “saying,” about what it seeks to accomplish?

### *Final Translation or Essay (50%)*

Either:

1) Same as above, but with a longer text (4-7 pages, say). The text may *not* be drawn from the same work as the translation above. Submit it 2 weeks in advance for approval.

Here, the paper reflecting on the translation should be longer (approximately 10 pages or 2,500 words), and it should engage with and reflect upon theories of translation—either those we have read in class or others.

2) As essay (15-20 pages) on the theory of translation. Topic to be approved by me, at least 3 weeks in advance of the due date.

### *Policy on Attendance:*

Should you miss **more than 2 classes** without documented illness or compassionate grounds, you will forfeit this portion of the course grade.

### *Policy on Incompletes:*

Grades of incomplete will only be granted in consultation with the Director and must be requested at least 2 weeks before the end of classes.

## **SCHOLASTIC OFFENSES**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf).

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

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September 10:	Introductions
September 24:	Brickman, <i>A Short Course in Reading French</i> , chapters 1-3  Venuti, from  Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator"; Paul de Man, "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator.'"
October 8:	Brickman, chapters 4-6  Venuti, Benjamin, and de Man, continued
October 24:	Fall Reading Week ( <b>No Class</b> )
November 5:	Brickman, chapters 7-9  Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel" (as much of the French as you can digest and all of the English).
November 19:	Brickman, chapters 9-12  Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel" (more of the French, the English again); Bass, "On the History of a Mistranslation."
December 3:	Brickman, chapters 13-14  Derrida, cont'd; Johnson, "Taking Fidelity Philosophically";

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In the Spring semester, I would like to begin to incorporate texts that the class wants to read together. These will be both texts that we can work on translating together and texts on the theory of translation. I have many that I can suggest, but I am also open to your suggestions.

January 7:	Brickman, chapters 15-16
January 21:	Brickman, chapters 17-18
February 4:	Brickman, chapters 19-20
February 18:	Spring Reading Week ( <b>No Class</b> )
March 4	Brickman, chapters 21-22

March 18: Brickman, chapters 23-24

April 1: Lots of translation practice, and wrapping up the theory.

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