

Translating Theory

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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 achieve similar proficiency in 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 first half of the course will work through the fundamental aspects of French grammar, wherever possible using 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.

The course is intended to satisfy the Centre's language requirement.

Assignments:

- 1) Annotated translation of a text of approximately 5 pages drawn from a 20th-century French theorist.
- 2) Short paper commenting on a translation of a short work (most likely an essay or chapter) from French theory or comparing two or more translations of the same work.
- 3) Essay on the theory of translation.