What Is a Narrative Approach to Translation?

Mona Baker
Centre for Translation & Intercultural Studies
University of Manchester
What is a narrative?

• A story that unfolds in time, with a (perceived) beginning and a (projected) end

• Populated by participants, real or imaginary, in a configured relationship to each other and to the unfolding story

• Realised through a variety of media …

• And across texts and media: local narratives are episodes of larger narratives
Example: Narratives Realised Across Texts - Local Narratives as Episodes of Larger Narratives

"These 39 writers have flung open the doors on Arabic culture, inviting the reader to transcend cultural boundaries and land in a region known as the "Arab World"."

HANAN AL-SHAYKH
Example: Narratives Realised Across Media

About us / Contacts

(Date: 15 June 2004)

What is Babels?

Babels is a network of volunteer interpreters and translators. It was born from the process of the Social Forums, experimental meeting spaces for movements and organisations from different countries and regions. Without interlinguistic and intercultural communication these spaces could not exist.

Babels is made up of activists of all tendencies and backgrounds, united in the task of transforming and opening up the Social Forums. We work to give voice to peoples of different languages and cultures. We fight for the right of all, including those who don't speak a colonial language, to contribute to the common work. We try to allow everyone to express themselves in the language of their choice. By increasing the diversity of contributions to the debate, we transform its outcome.
Babels es una red internacional de intérpretes y traductores voluntarios cuyo propósito es cubrir las necesidades en interpretación de los Foros Sociales.

WEBSITE UPDATES

- Localised > Italia
  Meeting antirazzista 2006 (Cecina, Italia) [21 giugno]

- Localised > México
  Taller ‘Otro mundo es necesario’ [25 de mayo]

- European SF > FSE-ESF 2006
  Texte de présentation de Babels [23 mai]

- Babels Intl. Meeting > Program / Participants
  List of participants [22 May]

- FSE-ESF 2006 > English booth
  Babels-uk report on the composition of the Babels participation

BABELS FORUM

- Participants in Babels Intl Meeting - 3 > 5 June/Julio/2006 [8 July]

- Activity 3 □ Training and selection in Babels Intl Meeting - 3 > 5 June/Julio/2006 [8 July]

- Documento del CH sobre Caracas2006 in IC/CI - HC/CH - EPA/AEP [8 July]

- Collaboration with Babels’ lexicons in Glossaries [5 July]

- Permanent Babels representatives in ICH, etc.? in Political Discussions [5 July]
What is Narrative (as theoretical concept)?

- Not a genre or textual form – ‘the shape of knowledge as we first apprehend it’
- Mediates and constructs reality
- Ultimate unit of analysis (in translation) is the narrative under construction
- Different narrative accounts are not just different versions of the ‘same’ story – conflict is built into the process of narration
In conclusion, I tell you in truth, that your security is not in the hands of Kerry, nor Bush, nor al-Qaida. No.

Your security is in your own hands. And every state that doesn't play with our security has automatically guaranteed its own security.
Your security is not in the hands of Kerry or Bush or Al-Qa’ida. Your security is in your own hands, and any [U.S.] state [wilaya] that does not toy with our security automatically guarantees its own security.
‘Equivalence’ and Conflictual Nature of Narratives

- Ahmadinjad (AP, New York Times, BBC, etc.) – ‘Israel Must Be Wiped Off the Map’

- See: ‘Wiped off the Map: Rumour of the Century’, Arash Norouzi

  http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/jun/14/post155
Why a Narrative Approach to Translation (Historical Context)

- Traditional preoccupation with equivalence
- Assumption of neutrality, ‘facilitating communication’
- Preoccupation with binarisms
- Emphasis on quality rather than ethics
- Tendency to isolate the contribution of translators from that of other agents in an interaction
- Focus on single instances of source and target texts
- Focus on purely linguistic analysis
What Narrative Theory Brings to the Study of Translation

- A recognition of the complexity of human choices
- A willingness to engage with the ethical implications of translator choices (textual and non-textual)
- A highly flexible set of conceptual and analytical tools that extend beyond traditional linguistic analysis
- A method of linking the individual text to other texts and events that participate in elaborating a particular narrative
- Awareness of the embeddedness of the analyst in the narratives being analysed
Example

Jenin Jenin

Documentary, 2002

Arabic with English Subtitles

Director: Mohamed Bakri
Old Palestinian Man Speaking to Film Director against the Background of Demolished Homes

"أنا عارف والله العظيم، والله العظيم، بيتنا ما صار بيت.

Literally

I don’t know, by God, by God, our home is no longer a home
What can I say? Not even Vietnam was as bad as this.


