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AN ITERATIVE TRANSLATION TEST*

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PURPOSE

IT WAS considered interesting to determine to what extent a given text, translated several times, each translation being made from the previous one, retains its original sense. *'Traduttore, traditore'*.

METHOD

To this end a selected passage of English text (version I) was translated in the sequence: I English; II French; III English; IV French; V English; so that a total of four translations took place. The translators were drawn from the International Telecommunication Union (I.T.U.) and the United Nations (U.N.), and each translator received only the preceding version without further information.

SUBJECT

As subject text, approximately two pages were taken from Will Durant's widely read *The Story of Philosophy* (New York), in which Durant discusses Bacon's tenet that philosophies reflect the nature of the originator and his surroundings rather than the intrinsic nature of the subject. This text was considered suitable as it treats a subject of general interest in an erudite manner and does not require incidental specialized knowledge.

SOME DETAILS

As an example of the change in style which resulted, a number of specific terms, as they pass through the various translators, are shown on page 398. Naturally, the significance of these changes can only be appreciated fully by reference to the context.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary conclusion that can be drawn from this test is that the meaning has been retained to a remarkable degree, though by comparison with the original (Version I), the style of Version V is entirely corrupted.

Thus a person reading the original, and another reading the final text,

* This paper was presented at the Symposium but not read. The actual translated texts are omitted from the version presented here. Those readers who would be interested in the details are advised to write directly to the author.—ED.

Para.	Line	I (E) (original)	II (F)	III (E)	IV (F)	V (E)
1	2	become	redevenir	become again	redevenir	become again
2	2	mistaken	prise	taken	prend	taken
2	6	cause	raison	reason	raison	reason
3	2	sense	jugement	judgment	jugement	judgment
3	3	standard	critère	criterion	critère	standard
3	9	really finds	est le cas	is really the case	reellement le cas	is the case
4	1	understanding	intelligence	intelligence	intelligence	intelligence
4	6	with violent prejudice	causant un grave préjudice	causing grave harm	cause un tort grave et dangereux	committing grave injury
5	4	dry light	lumiere franche	open light	flamme libre	unconfined flame
6	9	tentative	tentative	trials	essays	tentative
6	9	experiment	expérience	experience	expérience	experiments
8	4	wonderful	incroyable	unbelievable	incroyable	unbelievable
8	7	first cause uncaused	cause première non causale	non causal first cause	première cause non causale	first non-causal cause
8	8	first mover unmoved	mobile premier immuable	immutable primum mobile	premier mobile immuable	immovable first mobile
8	10	no cause can be causeless	aucune cause sans origine	no cause can be without origin	nulle cause sans origine	no cause without its origin
8	10	no moves unmoved	aucun mobile sans changement	no mobile can be without change	nul mobile sans changement	no mobile without change

should be able to agree on the content and the intent of the paper, although they might not be equally assisted in their appreciation of it by the respective styles.

In the original, even without the typographical indications, it is quite 1 clear where Durant himself is speaking, and where he is quoting Bacon, due to their different styles (though, of course, Bacon has been 'translated' into more modern English). In the final text, however, this distinction is no longer clear. Both styles have been lost, obviously by repeated changing from English to French idiom and *vice versa,* and have been to some extent replaced by the individual styles of the translators.