

## CONSILIENCE OR FRAGMENTATION IN TRANSLATION STUDIES TODAY?

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*Translation Studies has branched out into a heterogeneous interdiscipline during the past few decades. This development is not only the result of the emergence of different kinds of translation practices, research questions and new technologies, but also of different epistemological and ontological assumptions about the object of study. Four major areas are outlined: linguistic, cultural, cognitive and sociological. Connections between them are briefly discussed, but the main tendency has been one of fragmentation. Perhaps this does not matter?*

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During the past three or four decades, Translation Studies has gradually become an interdiscipline. This development was explicitly acknowledged at the Translation Studies Congress held in Vienna in 1992, from which selected papers were published under the title *Translation Studies: An Interdiscipline* (Snell-Hornby et al. 1994). Since then, there have been discussions on whether we are an interdiscipline, a multidiscipline (or pluridiscipline) or a transdiscipline and on the extent to which Translation Studies lends to or borrows from other disciplines (e.g. Kaindl 2004), but there is a broad consensus our field is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, both within itself and in its relationship to neighbouring fields. From its original roots in linguistics and literary studies, research has branched out in all directions, sometimes conceptualized as “Turns”, for instance, the “Cultural Turn” (for a survey, see Snell-Hornby 2006). Some of this expansion has been stimulated by advances in technology and machine translation, and by the emergence of new translation practices such as the varieties of multimodal translation and non-professional translation.

This development carries both a risk and a challenge. The risk is that the field will become so fragmented that it will break up into smaller, more specialized fields that no longer communicate with each other, hold joint conferences or publish in the same journals, or seek to relate their research to a shared general theory. Such a fragmentation would, of course, reflect the way science has progressed through the centuries: in the broadest terms, the mother-discipline of philosophy can be seen to have given birth to the separate fields of astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and so on. The challenge is to find ways of strengthening those features that still connect the different fragments. And one key concept here is that of consilience.



“Consilience” is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “the linking together of principles from different disciplines especially when forming a comprehensive theory”. It denotes the idea of the unity of all knowledge, an idea that was particularly important in the European Enlightenment, a period of humanist and scientific optimism. The concept has been given a new lease of life by the biologist Edward O. Wilson, whose book *Consilience*, appeared in 1998. Wilson was first known as a specialist on ants, but later became the founding figure of the field of sociobiology, which aims to use concepts and hypotheses derived from biology to examine and explain the social behaviour of human beings. Significantly, and ironically, sociobiology is thus itself an interdiscipline. Wilson has thus succeeded in fragmenting the field of science one step further, by adding an extra fragment, at the same time as he has endeavoured to link the fragments together, at least conceptually. Can Translation Studies follow suit? (Chesterman 2005).

Let us first examine some of the roots of the fragmentation in Translation Studies, before looking at some of its manifestations.

In 2000, Rosemary Arrojo and I opened a Forum debate in *Target* about the possibility of establishing “shared ground” in Translation Studies (see *Target* 12,1 and the following issues, concluding with 14,1). Each of us came to the discipline from a different background: Rosemary came more from literary and cultural studies and deconstruction, and I came from applied and contrastive linguistics. We originally framed our different views in terms of different assumptions about meaning (essentialist vs non-essentialist), but there were broader philosophical issues on which we also differed. Those who responded to our opening essay also represented different views, and some criticized the way we had framed the main contrasts between us (see especially Malmkjær 2000). At the end, the conclusion seemed to be (in my view at least) that there was actually very little shared ground to be seen. There were many differences of opinion concerning the kind of theory we should be trying to construct (and even whether any kind of general theory could be constructed at all); about the kinds of research questions that were most significant, about methodology, and about research aims. Another conceptual distinction that overlaps with the epistemological divide indicated above is that between nomothetic and idiographic approaches to knowledge; the distinction itself comes from Kant, but not these terms. A nomothetic approach seeks generalizations (as empirical research does), whereas an idiographic approach seeks specific, context-bound knowledge (cf. the hermeneutic view traditionally central to the humanities).

One central issue concerns how we see the object of our study: translation itself. This is thus an ontological issue. We are still arguing about what translation “is”, or what it can be, and what kind of concept it is. It is obviously fuzzy, shading off into adaptation, rewriting, versions, and other similar neighbouring categories. Some have seen translation as a prototype category (e.g. Halverson 1998), others as a cluster category (e.g. Tymoczko 2004); still others are beginning to doubt that any kind of universal definition is possible at all since there is so much temporal and cultural variation. Perhaps it is not a natural category at all, but a purely cultural one? One as-



pect of this ontological issue is the difficulty of conceptualizing “translation” as distinct from “good” translation. How bad can a translation be and still merit the label “translation”? Who decides?

There are also terminological disagreements. Some scholars are happy to extend the term “translation” (and its “equivalents” in other languages) to include metaphorical usage, such as when Salman Rushdie refers to himself as a translated man (1992). Others have preferred to restrict the term to its original textual use. Still others, especially those working in, or researching on, the translation industry, have tended to reduce the scope of the term, by opposing it to some other category. For the localization industry, for instance, translation is seen as just a small part of what they do, subordinate to the wider term of “localization”. In marketing and advertising, “translation” is becoming distinguished from “transcreation”, on the grounds that the latter is more demanding since it involves more creative imagination and adaptation to a new readership (see e.g. Gambier and Munday 2014, and other papers in that special issue of *Cultus*). Such a solution seems to assume that “normal” translation is not particularly creative and does not take account of different readers; many translators and scholars would disagree! And then, of course, there is the question of whether terms referring to “translation” in other languages, cultures and periods are really referring to “the same thing.”

Apart from ontological disagreements, we also have epistemological ones. The main issue here has been stated with elegant clarity by Dirk Delabastita (2003). He labels main opposition as empirical vs postmodern. Both these positions acknowledge that absolutely objective, value-free knowledge is not possible. Empiricists nevertheless strive towards this ideal with what Delabastita calls a “utopian” ambition. Empirical scholars look for norms, regularities, generalizations etc., on the basis of which predictions can be made, and systematically tested. Postmodernists also accept the impossibility of achieving totally objective knowledge but adopt a relativist position which allows considerable scope for self-reflexive exploration. They are more interested in what makes each translation unique than in claims about regularities, let alone laws. Their approach is individualistic and even playful, rather than systematic. Rather than hypothesis-testing, postmodernists are more interested in emancipating the translator and working for a fairer world in general.

These two positions are roughly represented in the two dominant methodological traditions that are current in Translation Studies (see e.g. Gile 2005). One is based on the empirical science tradition, and the other on the liberal arts tradition. The scholarly norms of these differ to some extent, and so do their respective traditions of academic writing.

We can now outline how these differences are manifested in the way the discipline is currently structured. This will be described here in terms of four major areas. These are not totally separate boxes but rather reflect differences of primary focus, and overlaps are normal.

At the traditional centre of Translation Studies we find linguistic research based on texts (written or oral). This addresses such issues as the relation between translations and their source texts; the conceptualization of equivalence and its various types; ways of achieving equivalence, for in-



stance via the use of translation strategies or shifts or solution types (see e. g. Pym 2016); the relation between translations and non-translations in the target language (often called parallel texts); and the search for “universals” or general tendencies that are hypothesized to characterize translations regardless of language pairs (Mauranen and Kujamäki 2004). This latter research has come to the fore with the increasing availability of large computer corpora and has borrowed many analytical methods and tools from corpus linguistics. The linguistic tradition also continues to contribute to, and draw on, contrastive analysis and contrastive rhetoric, as a way of specifying the range of possible options than a translator can choose between. More recent developments in linguistics, such as cognitive linguistics, have also influenced linguistically-oriented translation research (see Rojo Lopez et al. 2013). Linguistic research into translation was originally prescriptive and critical, concerned with translation quality; but outside the classroom or literary translation reviews, research now tends to be descriptive or explanatory. In terms of the epistemological dichotomy outlined above, linguistic textual research has been mainly carried out within the empirical paradigm.

The second major focus is cultural research. Translations are always embedded in cultures, or in an “intercultural” space (Bassnett and Lefevere 1996). The long tradition of Bible translation can be seen as an influential part of this focus. In culturally oriented research on translation, textual material is interpreted in terms of its cultural origin and history, and in terms of its effects and influences. Central themes include power, ideology, the spread of knowledge and ideas, translation history, the relation between centres and peripheries, cultural capital, cultural identity, the perception of “Otherness”, and translation ethics. One of the aims of this kind of research has been emancipatory: to give more visibility and autonomy to the translators themselves. The texts studied have mainly been literary, sacred or scientific. The epistemological background has been partly empirical, but it has become increasingly postmodern, borrowing from post-colonial studies, gender studies, and deconstruction.

The third focus is research on the translator’s (and interpreter’s) cognition. These days, this sometimes merges with the cognitive linguistic approach mentioned above. The central issue is simple: what goes on in the translator’s head? (Krings 1986) How are decisions made? We cannot study this process directly, so inferences have to be made from what we can observe. One early method was the use of Think-Aloud Protocols (TAPs), where a translator is required to think aloud as he/she translates. Inferences are then made from what is said, often about problems that have occurred, and from the positioning and lengths of pauses, for instance. Further inferences may be drawn from what is known about the translator’s emotional state, self-image, personality, personal history, value priorities, and so on (Jääskeläinen 2002). Later, key-logging and eye-tracking technologies have been taken into use, and even EEG and PET scans of the translator’s brain (see e.g. Muñoz Martín 2014). Most recently, it has been suggested that a move should be made towards incorporating the methods and theories of neuroscience (e.g. García et al. 2016). Another recent development is the growing interest in the approach known as embedded or embodied cogni-



tion, which sees the mind not as a self-contained black box, separate from the body, but rather as embedded in and part of its physical context, including the human body itself and its immediate environment (e.g. Risku 2014). In general, the cognitive focus is obviously based on the empirical paradigm.

The fourth general focus is a sociological one. This looks at translation as a social activity, from many points of view. Many translators work in a team, for instance, and this means that there are social relationships between team members such as project managers, revisers, colleagues, clients and so on. Network models of workplace procedures are proposed, to study the communication between the agents involved. Issues concerning the translator's agency are studied, such as autonomy, power and visibility (see Kinnunen and Koskinen 2010). Translators' treatment and working conditions are studied as factors affecting the assessment of translation quality: if working conditions are appalling, can the translator be blamed for a producing a poor translation? Translation quality is thus given an ethical aspect as well as a textual one (Abdallah 2012, Ehrensberger-Dow and O'Brien 2015). Sociological research has also looked at the international translation market, the economics of translation, the professionalization of translators and interpreters, accreditation systems, social status, and payment rates. Another important topic is non-professional translation, such as the use of children to interpret for their immigrant parents, or the amateur fan-translation of films or comics (see Brian Harris's blog). Yet another significant area is translation policy and its relation to language policy. In sociological research on translation, theoretical concepts have obviously been borrowed from sociology (theories such as norm theory, Bourdieu's work, and Agent Network Theory), and so have data collection and elicitation methods (e.g. questionnaires, interviews). The general philosophical background has been empirical: the activity of translation is studied as a human science (see e.g. Wolf and Fukari 2007).

The four focus areas sketched above are obviously interrelated. One connecting feature is the increasing use of technology. In terms of the textual focus, the relevance of technology is evident in the growing field of multimedia translation, encompassing subtitling, dubbing, audio description, and the like. Machine translation (MT) is nowadays a field of its own, developed by computer scientists and/or computer linguists, but its influence on Translation Studies has been important, particularly in terms of the various technical aids that have emerged as offshoots of the MT project: electronic term banks, translation memory programs, translator's workbench systems, computer-aided translation, and so on.

From a cultural history perspective, doubts have been raised about the risk of dehumanizing of translation (Pym 2003). From the sociological perspective, there is concern about the detrimental ergonomic effects that the contemporary computer-dominated working environment may have, both on translation quality and on translators' sense of professional identity. Cognitive research, as noted above, is making increasing use of sophisticated technology. What happens to the human mind, at the interface of humanity and technology?



Another trend that connects cultural, cognitive and sociological focuses is that these are all primarily concerned with people rather than texts. To reflect this shared interest in the human agents involved in translation, the label “Translator Studies” has been proposed (Chesterman 2009). Perhaps this trend will promote interconnections across these sections of the discipline.

Connections across all four approaches can also be made via different kinds of explanation. If we take a textual feature of a translation or a set of translations, say the feature X, we can first describe it, but then we can ask why X has occurred. The initial (proximate) explanation is, of course, that it has occurred because the translator so decided. I. e. the reason is to be found somewhere in the translator’s cognition or emotional state. But if we continue to ask why, we may look for causal conditions outside the translator’s head, for instance in the sociological situation, including the resources available, the revision process, the nature of the source text, and so on. And beyond that, there may be cultural conditions such as ideology, censorship, and power relations. The notion of causality implied in the appeal to these conditions is of course much looser than the sense of causality that is used in the natural sciences, where higher levels of predictability are at issue, compared with the more variable nature of human behaviour. But causal factors of many kinds can still be hypothesized, and to some extent tested, across our four areas of focus. Furthermore, translations are not just effects of complex causal influences; they also act as causes themselves, and have their own effects, on readers’ responses, sociological behaviour and perhaps even wider cultural trends. So we can also investigate chains of causal influence by investigating retrospectively from a given effect which we suspect may be due to a translation. For instance, the failure of a play to win popularity in another culture, despite being a hit in its source culture, can be plausibly explained by certain stylistic features of the translation that the target-culture production was based on (see Leppihalme 2000).

Other kinds of explanation may also serve to link different research areas. Contextualizing a puzzling feature of text or behaviour may also help us to make sense of it, even without appealing overtly to causal factors (Chesterman 2008). This is a well-known analytical procedure in history, for instance, or in sociology, or indeed culture studies. Placing a significant translation in the context of colonial or post-colonial history can contribute to an understanding of how it came to take the form that it did. (For an example that illustrates both causal and contextual explanation, see Fenton and Moon 2002.) Indeed, if we wish to go beyond linguistic description, in the direction of explanation, we have no alternative but to venture into one or all of the other fields we are dealing with here.

Attempts have also been made to unite the whole of Translation Studies under a broader umbrella theory. One suggestion has been to conceptualize translation within memetics, the study of memes (culturally transmitted ideas, metaphorically parallel to biological genes: see Chesterman 1997). Another view situates translation within semiotics (Gorlée 1994). One of the most developed proposals so far has been to apply Relevance Theory to translation, as just one kind of communication among others (Gutt 1991).



A more modest way of exploring links between different segments of Translation Studies is to exploit concepts that in some way bridge the gaps between the segments: we could call these “bridge concepts” (Chesterman 2005). Here are three examples. (a) Norm theory is a sociological theory, but the concept of the norm itself is both social and cultural. Norms vary between cultures; they embody cultural values but they exercise prescriptive influence over social behaviour. Consider the norms of personal proximity, for instance: in some cultures, two people engaged in a conversation naturally stand more closely to each other than in other cultures, depending on how the notion of personal space is interpreted. In translation, evidence of norms can be found in textual regularities when these are supported by extratextual evidence in the form of norm statements or the like (see e.g. Bartsch 1987, Toury 1995). (b) The translation brief, i. e. the instructions given by the client, is another kind of bridge, between the social sphere and the cognitive sphere: the brief affects how the translator will think about the task at hand, what kind of overall strategy will be most appropriate, how to adapt the text to the intended readership, and so on. In skopos theory, the brief is given particular significance (Reiß and Vermeer 1984). And (c) the concept of the translation strategy itself links the translator’s cognition with the textual product which this cognition gives rise to. Strategies have been defined as problem-solving plans, either at the general level of the text as a whole (e.g. choosing the kind of equivalence that should be given priority in a given case) or locally (e.g. choosing a solution for the translation of a given culture-bound concept). The terminology of strategies and their taxonomies has varied hugely: some approaches are more textually oriented (e.g. shift analysis), others more cognitive. (For a recent proposal, which also offers a comprehensive critical survey of the history of the concept, see Pym 2016.)

More pragmatically, we are seeing an increasing number of research projects involving cooperation between specialists in different sub-fields or disciplines, projects that involve dialogue as well as conceptual and methodological borrowings and lendings. A recent book (Gambier and van Doorslaer 2016) offers dialogues between translation scholars and representatives of the following fields: history, military history, information science, communication studies, sociology, neuroscience, biosemiotics, adaptation studies, computer science, computational linguistics, business and marketing studies, multilingualism, comparative literature, game localization, language pedagogy, and gender studies. This gives a good idea of the complex relations that our interdiscipline engages in.

However, so far it seems that there is more evidence of fragmentation than of consilience. Translation scholars continue to use many different kinds of data, different methods and different theoretical frameworks, and they do not all hold the same epistemological and ontological assumptions. They may share the very general goal of a better understanding of translation in all its forms, and of the translation process. But there is no agreement on what a coherent “General Theory of All Translation” might look like, nor even that such a theory would be desirable or useful, or indeed possible.



Perhaps this does not matter, as long as heterogeneous views can be openly discussed, as Rosemary Arrojo notes in her closing comment on the Target Forum debate (2002, 142).

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## СОВРЕМЕННОЕ ПЕРЕВОДОВЕДЕНИЕ: ЦЕЛОСТНОСТЬ ИЛИ ФРАГМЕНТАРНОСТЬ?

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*В течение последних десятилетий переводоведение постепенно стало разнородным и междисциплинарным. Это связано не только с появлением различных переводческих практик, новых проблем исследования и новых технологий, но и с наличием различающихся эпистемологических и онтологических взглядов на объект науки о переводе. В рамках переводоведения можно выделить четыре основных направления – лингвистическое, культурологическое, когнитивное и социологическое. В статье кратко рассматриваются их взаимосвязи, однако отмечается, что превалирует тенденция к фрагментации направлений. Автор ставит вопрос, имеет ли это значение для переводоведения.*

**Ключевые слова:** междисциплинарность, целостность, фрагментарность, объяснение.

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