

# EMBEDDING IMAGOLGY IN TRANSLATION STUDIES (AMONG OTHERS)<sup>1</sup>

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*Imagology, the study of national and cultural images as represented in textual discourse, is a fruitful approach for disciplines dealing with textual change, such as translation studies. Both imagology and translation studies have gradually extended their area of research, which has revealed growing commonalities. Journalistic texts have for instance been included in research that was previously almost exclusively dealing with literary discourse. Moreover interest in imagological research, sometimes related to the distribution of a promoted national or cultural self-image, has now also grown in countries outside of Europe. Future perspectives for findings on image spread through translation are offered through collaboration with existing research in sociology and psychology.*

**Keywords:** *national and cultural images, rewriting, (travel) journalism, author/translator.*

Over the past decades, the view on translation has developed from a traditional linguistic activity based on the concept of equivalence, to a much broader and dynamic process. The discipline of translation studies is not only studying traditional interlingual translation or ‘translation proper’, but its object has extended to a broader range of text-modifying practices, such as intralingual rewriting, interpreting, intersemiotic adaptation, localization, etc. (see for instance Gambier 2016 or van Doorslaer 2018). Translation nowadays is studied as an instrument with societal, cultural and/or linguistic impact, and translators themselves have become a prominent object of sociological research, conceptualized as agents developing their own political, cultural or linguistic agenda (see Heilbron & Sapiro 2007, Sapiro 2016). Both source and target culture actors (besides translators also authors, publishers, cultural policy agents, reviewers, etc.) are involved in the processes of gate-keeping, representation, and national and cultural image-building.

Distributing information potentially also includes the spread of ‘images’, both in a general and a more specific sense – such as nationally or culturally marked mental images. Every concrete act of text production is also necessarily preceded by different stages of selection and decision procedures, including framing and formulation choices. Because of the central societal



function of nation states especially since the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, also the related construction of national and cultural identities was foregrounded. Therefore many texts include choices that might be, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by national and cultural image-building. When such choices, perspectives or frames are transferred to a new target text, as in the act of translation or similar text-modifying practices, an additional selection and decision process about these choices is unavoidable. The background knowledge and perception will be different according to the source and target audience, which is taken into account when transferring information about national and cultural images. This may lead to changes of perspective, the use of stereotypes, omissions or additions, and manipulations. Such changes make the study of national and cultural image-building a highly interesting field for translation studies, as “translation is one of the ways in which works of literature are ‘re-written’, and these re-writings are the primary way in which cultures construct ‘images’ and ‘representations’ of authors, texts and entire periods of history” (Marinetti 2011: 27).

### 1. What exactly is Imagology?

Over the past decades such forms of representation and image-building in (mainly literary) texts have been studied by ‘imagology’. The word is slightly alienating for English speakers, but is related to the origin of the research in the German and French language areas. There this type of research is called *Imagologie* (German) or *imagologie* (French). Moreover, the term ‘imagology’ avoids confusion with ‘image studies’, an approach concentrating mainly on visual instead of mental images. The roots of imagology lie in literary studies, as a specialization of comparative literary research (see e.g. Beller in Beller & Leerssen 2007: 7). Imagology studies and theorizes national and cultural stereotypes from a transnational and comparative point of view. It is important to note that it is not a theory of national or cultural identity. Imagology does not study what nations or nationalities *are*, but rather how they are *represented*. History has charged terms such as ‘nation’, ‘people’ or ‘identity’, therefore imagological approaches concentrate on more constructionist models, away from essentialist definitions. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that a considerable part of our views on the world is dominated by national and cultural categorizations. As such it would be strange to deny this reality from a researcher’s point of view. This stance is important: imagology is descriptive, rather than explanatory, for “it is the aim of imagology to describe the origin, process and function of national prejudices and stereotypes, to bring them to the surface, analyse them and make people rationally aware of them” (Beller in Beller & Leerssen 2007: 11–12).

It is exactly these descriptive and diachronic viewpoints that allow imagology to register and examine contradictions and gradual changes in perception, thus also allowing it to deal with hybrid and fluid images. An example can illustrate this: Ruth Florack has explored the different image(s) of France and the French. It exists a repertoire of stereotypes that can carry both positive and negative connotations, depending on the stance or the



viewpoint: perceiver A can experience civilized behavior, verbal eloquence and refined social manners, whereas perceiver B experiences arrogance, showiness and vanity. The characteristics are very similar, nevertheless they are perceived in an almost opposite way. Because of the French cultural hegemony in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, many French stereotypes have been defined as hierarchically superior. However, such hierarchical difference includes features that once were considered positive, but can now be perceived as rather negative (Florack in Beller & Leerssen 2007: 155).

Some researchers consider imagology a (sub)discipline. The study of national and cultural images and ethnotypes undeniably could have the potential of being a discipline or sub-discipline. But disciplines are also characterized by a certain degree of institutionalization, which is lacking for imagology. Sometimes it is called a “working method” (Leerssen 2016: 19). However, handbooks of methodology never specifically mention imagology. Though an imagological approach complies with the classical features of adopting a method (systematicity of investigation, a mode of procedure, etc.), it is never put at a similar level with methods such as discourse analysis, corpus gathering, keystroke logging, eye tracking, interviews or surveys. Maybe it is more realistic to rather consider imagology a selection principle, a lens through which the material is studied, a perspective functioning as a criterion for selecting the imagologically relevant material. Such a lens can be adopted with the help of several methods. An imagological lens can be applied through text analysis or interviews, a relevant selection is possible with corpora or eye tracking. From a methodological point of view, imagological analysis is always an interplay between textual (narratology, discourse analysis), contextual (situatedness of a text, reception history, incl. the importance of paratexts) and intertextual (textual dissemination history) analysis – see also Leerssen 2016.

## 2. Beyond literature, beyond Europe

The study of national and cultural mental images and stereotypes as offered in textual representations, another possible description of imagology, has recently extended its object of research to non-literary texts as well – such as political or journalistic discourse, touristic brochures, audiovisual material, etc.; see for instance van Doorslaer, Flynn & Leerssen (2015). Despite that extension of the research scope in imagology, literature – because of its canonical potential – still plays an undisputed role in the distribution of images. Especially in smaller countries or cultures who seek to valorize their cultural potential, “translation is a form of capital acquisition” as well as “a key aspect of the international circulation of literature which is often neglected in accounts of cultural globalization that stress processes of homogenization” (Bielsa 2013: 160, also referring to Pascale Casanova). Bielsa illustrates how the boom of the Latin American novel in the 1970s for instance, was linked to the image of an exotic Latin America. Particularly the seminal works of Gisèle Sapiro on translation flows show the importance of literary translation in power relations between cultures and countries. “For a nation-state, exporting its literature in translation is a sign of its symbolic



recognition on the international scene" (Sapiro 2016: 84). Here she also explicitly includes the justification of public subvention of such translations, as they "would help improve the image of the country" (ibid.).

Some fields have presented themselves as more prolific than others, particularly textual transfers whereby aspects of (cultural context) adaptation are more evident. Children's literature is a case in point: Frank (2007) studied the images of Australia spread in translated French children's literature. The book deals with interpretive choices and how they work when texts are moved from one culture to another, with the way images of a nation, locale or country are constructed. Several issues are examined, like the selection of books for translation, the packaging of translations, the linguistic and stylistic features specific to translating for children, intertextual references, the function of the translation in the target culture, etc. Another example is Seifert's work on the images of Canada in German juvenile literature (Seifert 2005). A modern, urban version of Canada is totally absent in the German target texts; the patterns of perception are bound to very traditional images and clichés, such as crystal-clear rivers and lakes, bears and moose: "the Canadian wilderness is safeguarded and idealized as a haven of innocence, beauty, and human values, a physical and mental healing place, a spiritual and ecological sanctum, a paradise untouched by the destructive effects of civilization" (Seifert in Beller & Leerssen 2007: 116).

Interestingly, imagology is no longer the sole academic territory of Western European researchers as it used to be the case in the 1970s or 1980s. In recent years, several conferences with an explicit imagological approach, also recognizing the importance of translation in that process, have taken place in countries such as Turkey ("Transferring Cultural Images: Parallels between Stereotyping and Globalising", Istanbul 2014; or "Extranslation in Theory and Practice: Representation of Turkish Culture through Translation", Ankara 2015) or China ("Images as Translational Fictions", Guangzhou 2017). This is also shown in publications such as Li (2016) or Demirkol-Ertürk (2013) and Kuran-Burçoğlu (2009). A recent example of a colloquium not concentrating on the own national image, but rather focusing on hetero-images through translation is 'Translating Images of Canada' (Tartu, Estonia, 2019). Despite the modern focus on transnational and cross-national thinking in a globalizing world, recent history clearly shows that ethnic, national and cultural categories "are perhaps the most ingrained way of pigeonholing human behavior into imputed group characteristics" (Leerssen 2016: 14). Therefore, it may be no coincidence that apparently re-emerging nations such as Turkey and China have a particular interest in image dissemination and in the related academic research.

The already mentioned extension of imagological research to journalistic discourse may surprise us because of the literary roots of imagology, on the other hand there are also reasons making it obvious. Journalism studies have produced a huge amount of research on representation that has quite some aspects in common with the study of stereotypes. One example explicitly connecting representation with discourses of identity and Self-Other rhetoric is Le (2006). As translation studies is a discipline that over the past decades has also developed from a main focus on literary discourse to a diversity of



discourses, it is flexible enough to include research on image-building in several types of discourse. On the other hand imagology's focus on the function of literary and cultural transfer in ethnotyping, in combination with its attention for diachrony, shows a much more specific object and approach. The origins of imagological research in literary studies have also contributed to an emphasis on the richness of literary discourse in this regard, in combination with the importance of literary canonicity strengthening the perception of ethnotypes. Yet, in our modern media world the omnipresence of journalistic discourse also plays an important role. The feature of constant repetition of certain (national and cultural) stereotypes in the media may achieve an effect similar to canonization. Looking at it from this perspective, it might be worthwhile addressing the relative underrepresentation of journalistic discourse in imagology.

### 3. Examples from (travel) journalism

Yet, underrepresentation does not equal absence. Several studies have already shown the potential imagological relevance of journalistic sources. An example is Fowler (2007), who investigates the role of journalism in the development of British ideas about Afghanistan. Interestingly, Fowler shows how the journalists copied – and as such also confirmed – centuries-old clichés that were transmitted through journalistic accounts and travel narratives.

Casting its net deep into the nineteenth century, the study investigates how British travellers and journalists continue to inherit the paranoias and prejudices of their nineteenth-century predecessors and why, in British imaginations, Afghans tend to remain warlike, medieval, murderous and unruly. (Fowler 2007: 4f.)

Particularly in historical research it is not necessarily a coincidence that travelers and journalists are mentioned on equal footing. Travel writing and travel journalism form a productive mixed genre for clichés as well as for national or cultural stereotyping, as they register otherness and explore “individual and national identity. [...] travel writing is almost invariably about Self and Other” (Coenen 2013: 8). Lily Coenen's study (2013) on the image of Spain in Dutch travel writing is an example showing the development and variety of such image-building over a century of time, and how the authors were intertextually influenced by the readings of literary fiction. Intertextuality is mainly studied in literary sources, but it obviously also appears in journalistic discourse. Discursive reflections of otherness, or at least of the way otherness is perceived, is the heart of the matter of imagological research.

In her study on the images of Sicily, Smecca (2009) has shown how tourist guidebooks can be changed, sometimes even manipulated by editors and translators in order to meet target readers' expectations. Such changes clearly appeal to culture-bound prejudices and stereotypes. Dimitriu (2012) is an interesting account of two 'Western' travel books about Romania that were translated into...Romanian. The mirroring exercise made the preliminary stereotyping as well as the cultural filtering, both in the writing in English



and in the translation into Romanian, doubly visible. At the same time it shows to what extent the translator is the actual author, and translation is an intercultural exercise.

This highly formative exercise would first entail a relativization of the Western perspective from which the books were written. After all, if the trip had been undertaken by an Eastern/Oriental traveller, the cultural filtering and translation of Romania would have been considerably different. Such an approach would help the target readers to (gradually) give up their unproductive, 'small peripheral culture' inferiority complex and thus de-hegemonize their intercultural relations. (Dimitriu 2012: 326)

All this illustrates that more journalistic types of discourse such as travel writing – “a type of text or genre that has received much more attention than earlier and has moved from the periphery much closer to the centre of current academic discourse” – enable and facilitate a media-oriented extension of the research object in imagology (Zacharasiewicz 2009: 26). This would also reflect the crucial role mass media in modern societies has in the expression of cultural identities: “it is uncontested that radio and television [...] have played a central role in the dissemination of national culture, national values and national stereotypes” (Göttlich 2007: 356).

Interdisciplinary connections are also possible between imagology and some of the journalism studies research on representation and stereotyping. An example would be the research by Lasorsa and Dai (2007) on (intentional or unintentional) default stereotyping as well as the “overabundance of nationality-related stereotypes” (292) in the writing of deceptive news stories. According to their study, the less journalists are informed, the more they stereotype. When gaps have to be filled in – a daily practice in journalistic production – it regularly happens that stereotypes are taken over from hear-say or from earlier news items.

All these perspectives suggest that in the presence of a mass of potential facts, stereotyping tends to occur to streamline work and ease the perceiver's discrepancy between what is expected and observed. Unless a perceiver is able and motivated not to stereotype, stereotyping is likely to function by default, a process psychologists call *automaticity*. (Lasorsa & Dai 2007: 281)

This interesting phenomenon of the automaticity of stereotyping in journalism, as an element in the journalistic process of streamlining work and content in the chaos of facts, reminds us of imagological insights such as the oppositionality of ethnotyping or the ways in which Self-Other oppositions are implied or invoked.

#### 4. The author's position

All the above mentioned interrelated examples linking up travel writing, literary travel journalism or the automaticity of stereotyping, have the determining position of the author as their missing link. “One of the basic in-



sights in image studies is that the mechanism of the representation of foreign nations can only be analysed properly if we take the attitude of the author into account" (Leerssen, s.d.). Translation studies and imagology have several elements in common, such as the descriptive and diachronic viewpoints or the centrality of change and hybridity. Yet, also the role of the author in the discursive variation of representation is a fundamental common feature. A translator is a cultural mediator, an informant transferring cultural knowledge, and as such also authoring a new text. The literary publishing world creates the illusion that we read Thomas Mann when we read 'Buddenbrooks' in English or Russian, but in reality the English or Russian 'Buddenbrooks' is a text of which Mann has not written one single word, but is a re-creation of the respective translator. The illusion is based on the obsolete model that languages are equivalent structures as well as on the romantic concepts of originality, the unique authority of the source text ('original') and the source text author.

Exactly this hybridity and complexity of the author status is also important from an imagological perspective. Interlingual translation, and even more so intralingual and intersemiotic translation (the three types of translation already distinguished in Jakobson 1959), offers the author-translator an extra filter in the rewriting or re-conveying of images. When translation is no longer traditionally looked at in terms of non-change, but as an element in a chain of textual, contextual and intertextual change, it contributes to the diversification of stereotyping as well. This potential power of translation for the distribution of images can be illustrated by the discussion in China about the 'correct' dissemination of Chinese culture through English translations, including the question whether this can be executed better by English native translators or by native Chinese (see for instance Hu 2015). This Chinese case of auto-image-building illustrates the use of translation for selecting and highlighting certain features, a well-known principle in the rhetoric of ethnotyping. A notorious historical example about the double-sidedness or power of translating mediators is that of La Malinche or Doña Marina, the (among other things) local interpreter of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés (see for instance Valdeón 2013).

### 5. Imagological constants

Constants that regularly return in imagological research are oppositions such as North-South (for instance strongly present in a country like Italy, but also within Europe as a continent) or center-periphery (an example would be France: Paris and the rest). Although they are geographical at first sight, at the same time they mainly include stereotypical mental representations, such as the hard working Northerner vs. the easy going Southerner. The third constant clearly overcomes the geographical disposition and is interestingly hybrid: the fact that there are contradictory stereotypes available for more or less each country, showing the relativity of typicality. Is the typical Englishman the gentleman or the hooligan? Is it typically French to be fash-



ionable or to have jocular humor? Is it typically Spanish to relate to a Mediterranean holiday feeling as Erasmus student or rather to expansionist violence as in colonial or dictator Franco times? These oppositional examples show that every author, journalist or otherwise text producer (including translators) can to a certain extent make use of a range of existing stereotypes. Some of them are more present in certain periods than others, but seldom disappear. Over the past century the most obvious example illustrating that is probably the case of Germany. Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the stereotypical German was walking through the woods while making poetry and philosophizing. Under the influence of only a few decades, but with the rise of Germany as an economic powerhouse and with two World Wars, the dominant German stereotype became one of violence and/or economic efficiency.

Through the centuries there also have been many oppositional representations of the East and the West within the Eurasian framework. Oriental peoples and cultures were sometimes valorized as cruel, expansionist or despotic, but just as well as mysteriously attractive, inventive or mythical. Since the Cold War period, an intra-European East-West categorization can be discerned. It is a productive trope, as it also lends itself to reinforcement by the use of dichotomous categories. An oppositional, occasionally black and white presentation belongs to the toolbox of every communicator who has to present a complex situation to a larger audience. What is true for North-South or center-periphery also goes for East-West. If such a simplified presentation is successful, it can become ingrained and difficult to correct at a later stage. An example is the division of Europe in two categories: Eastern vs. Western Europe, referring to the Cold War era and the Iron Curtain. It is a distinction that is frequently, almost automatically made in journalistic discourse. This is remarkable, taking into consideration that the Iron Curtain doesn't exist anymore for three decades. Nevertheless it still seems to be the determining element for a simplified division of the European continent, including the connotations of East and West that also refer to Cold War commonplaces.

A more nuanced, trans-dichotomous, but also fuzzier concept such as 'Central Europe' is hardly used. The fuzziness is also illustrated by the fact that similar terms in other languages are not necessarily equivalent, but have a partly different cultural and mental frame of reference, such as *Mitteleuropa* in German or *Europe médiane* in French. Central Europe does not have clear borders marked by an Iron Curtain, but is a term with a combination of historical, cultural and political content. It is mainly the fuzziness of the borders that makes the concept of Central Europe much less attractive for journalistic use than the bi-polarity of Eastern vs. Western Europe. Despite the stereotypical potential of bordering based on wind directions, the arbitrariness of such separations is also shown by other examples. In the north of Europe, the term 'Central Europe' is often used as part of a north-south presentation, meaning the central part between north and south. And the Baltic Sea is called 'Ostsee' [Eastern Sea] in German, but 'Läänemeri' [Western Sea] in Estonian. Assigning intra-European ethnotypical characteristics becomes almost a haphazard exercise in such cases.





## 6. Conclusion and prospects

National and cultural categories have all but disappeared in our perception, interpretation and categorization of real world phenomena. For that reason, imagological approaches will probably remain fruitful for future research on all types of text modification, including translation. With the growing awareness of textual change, ethical aspects may become more prominent in research, both regarding the author/translator and the researcher. It would also add value to the existing interconnections between (sub) disciplines, if findings of social psychology could also be integrated in imagological research. Up to now, the findings on stereotyping and ethnotyping have not really been connected to related research in personality and cross-cultural psychology, where important work on national character stereotyping has been done. The textual dimension of ethnotyping has great potential of connecting with the shared beliefs of personality traits typical to people of a particular nation (for instance Realo & Allik 2017). Although imagological material illustrates that ethnotypes are “by no means historical constants” (Leerssen 2016: 18), psychological research has also shown that the national character stereotypes are surprisingly stable over time and that even significant political or economic events do not radically change their content, at least not in the short term (for instance Hřebíčková & Graf 2014). Relating this type of research to imagology would undoubtedly also be fruitful for the centrality of transfer in translation studies.

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## ВНЕДРЕНИЕ ИМАГОЛОГИИ В ПЕРЕВОДОВЕДЕНИЕ

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*Разнообразные подходы, предлагаемые имагологией – научной дисциплиной, изучающей национальные и культурные образы, могут быть с успехом использованы в рамках других наук, связанных с созданием текстов, прежде всего в переводоведении. Имагология и переводоведение постепенно расширяют области своих исследований, демонстрируя возрастающую общность проблематики. Тексты газетных публикаций анализируются в аспекте создания образов так, как это ранее делалось исключительно на материале художественной литературы. Во многих странах, в том числе за пределами Европы, растет интерес к имагологическим исследованиям, связанным с продвижением национального или культурного имиджа стран и народов. В статье описываются перспективы синергетического развития имагологии и перевода с привлечением достижений социологии и психологии.*

**Ключевые слова:** национальный и культурные образы, рерайтинг, путешествия, журналистика, автор / переводчик.

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