

# Scope, Purpose & Meaning of Theory in Translation Studies

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# Range of activities to account for

- Written translation
  - Literary
  - Non-literary
  - Religious/sacred texts
- Multimodal translation
  - Screen translation
  - Comics, cartoons
  - Web localisation
- Oral interpreting
  - Mode: simultaneous, consecutive, liaison, chuchotage
  - Context: conference, business, community, court
- Sign language interpreting

# Scope of Translation Studies

- Textual Products
- Social/Literary/Political Impact
- Agendas of Agents (inc. Institutions)
- Cognitive and material constraints
- History of Translator- & Interpreter-Mediated Events and Products

# What is Theory?

- A vantage point
- Hence: no single theory (always partial)
- Theories have strengths and weaknesses (and blindspots)
- Interdependent across the humanities

# Core Questions Addressed

- How does a particular phenomenon behave/unfold (**description**)?
- Why does it behave the way it does/under what circumstances (**explanation/qualification: constraints, motivations, etc.**)?
- What impact does this behaviour have on other phenomena/society/the profession/discipline, etc. (**Implications**)

# Description

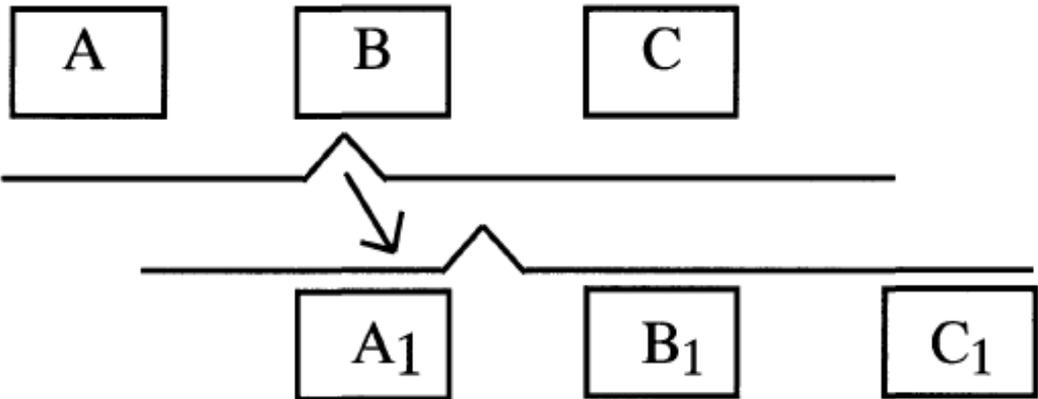
- What strategies do literary translators between Persian and English (or Arabic and Turkish, etc.) use in dealing with culture-specific items?
- What role did/do interpreters play in colonial encounters? E.g. do they get involved in intelligence gathering? Do they get involved in interrogating prisoners?
- How do conference interpreters deal with cognitive stress (e.g. in the case of high input rate)?

# Explanation/Qualification

- To what extent does reading speed influence deaf viewers' ability to follow subtitled films and programmes?
- What factors motivate the choice of particular source languages in literary translation?
- Why do conference interpreters produce unnatural intonation and stress patterns?

# Description & Explanation

SPEAKER:



INTERPRETER:

Source: William, Sara (1995) 'Observations on Anomalous Stress in Interpreting', *The Translator* 1(1): 47-64. Pages 49 and 51, respectively.

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Speaker: *somnar* monopolisten förr eller senare in ..... och *sussar* gott ...

Interpreter: *doing* this ..... and .... therefore ..... the person who *has a* monopoly

..... och levererar dålig service till ett högt pris .... **Detta** är ett ..... er ..... ett  
will more or less go to sleep ..... and ..... will deliver very bad services to a very

..... empiriskt och ..... vetenskap-  
high **PRICE** ..... And ..... this is an empir-

Gloss: ... the monopolist will sooner or later *go to sleep* and sleep well and deliver bad service at a high price. **This** is an empirical and scientif- ....

In this example, the anomalous stress is on the word *price*. The corresponding word in the original, *pris*, was unstressed, and there is no discourse-related reason for stressing *price*. The anomalous stress follows a stressed item in the input, *detta*, with a time lag of approximately 2.802 seconds (See Graphs 1a and 1b).<sup>5</sup>

# Implications

- What is the impact (ethical, social, political, aesthetic) of the choice of particular strategies in a given translation or interpreting encounter?
- What are the implications (for the individual, the profession, or society) of treating translators/interpreters as conduits and language as transparent tool?

# Theory

## *Example: Physics*

- Theory/law of gravity:

Two particles attract each other with forces directly proportional to the product of their masses divided by the square of the distance between them.

# Theory

## *Example: Translation Studies*

- tolerance of interference – and hence the endurance of its manifestations – tend to increase when translation is carried out from a ‘major’ or highly prestigious language/culture, especially if the target language/culture is ‘minor’, or ‘weak’ in any other sense.

Toury, Gideon (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, p. 278.

# Theory and Critical Thinking

## Key Concept: Equivalence

ST: Source Text; TT: Target Text

- ST/TT → same meaning
- ST/TT → same effect
- ST/TT → same function
- TT → independent function  
(commission)
- TT → independent function  
(situation, agents)

# Same Meaning? Nonsense Writing?

## Jabberwocky

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)

# Same meaning? Creativity?

## Ofa Sunday

i watch the  
newspapers for  
hours & browse  
through T.V.  
miss mass  
and wonder  
if mass  
misses me

*Roger McGough*

# Same effect? Concrete poetry?

*La colombe poignardée  
et le jet d'eau*

Douce figures poi<sup>gnardée</sup> Chères lèvres fleuries  
MIA MAREYE  
YETTE LORIE  
ANNIE et toi MARIE  
o ù êtes-  
vous ô  
jeunes filles  
MAIS  
près d'un  
jet d'eau qui  
pleure et qui prie  
cette colombe s'extasie

Tous les souvenirs de <sup>Raynal</sup> Billy Dalize  
Omes amis partis en guerre ? Où sont Raynal Billy Dalize  
Jaillissent vers le firmament ? Où sont Raynal Billy Dalize  
Et vos regards en l'eau dorman<sup>t</sup> Comme des pas dans une église  
Meurent mélancolique<sup>ment</sup> ? Où est Cremnitz qui s'engagea  
Où sont-ils Braque et Max Jacob ? Peut-être sont-ils morts déjà  
Derain aux yeux gris comme l'abeille De souvenirs mon âme est pleine  
le jet d'eau pleure sur ma peine

CEUX QUI SONT PARTIS A LA GUERRE AU NORD SE BATTENT MAINTENANT  
Le soir tombe O sanglante mer  
Jardins où saigne abondamment le laurier rose fleur guerrière

Figure 3: 'La Colombe poignardée et le jet d'eau' by Guillaume Apollinaire

## Same Effect: Limits of Mediation, Question of Agency

- **Version 1 (Reeves-Ellington 1999:114)**

One of the saddest moments of my life was my mother's early death. She died from heart disease when she was 45 years old and I was still in high school. But I think the harsh village life killed her. She worked as a teacher, and she had village work and field work to do. Conditions were unimaginably harsh. The land was so mountainous and infertile. And then she had to help her mother-in-law. Quite simply the harsh village life had an adverse effect on her, and she passed away very early.

My mother.  
I told you, didn't I  
that one of the *harshest* moments of my life  
which I think *most harshly* affected my fate  
was my mother's early death.  
My mother died when I was still a girl in high school.  
My mother died when she was 45 years old  
from heart disease.  
But I think  
my mother died because of the *harsh village life*.  
*Unimaginably harsh* conditions.  
And school work  
And village work  
And those fields  
Mountainous  
Infertile  
She had to help with that  
That and her mother-in-law.  
Quite simply  
the *harsh village life* affected her very badly  
and she passed away very early  
my mother.