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)
• 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: sommar 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).
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.

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)
Jabberwocky

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

Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)
i watch the newspapers for hours & browse through T.V.
miss mass and wonder if mass misses me

Roger McGough
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.