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The Value of Translation Theory for Translation Practice

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Abstract

Despite the fact that many translation practitioners acknowledge the importance of translation theory for shaping and delivering functional translations and helping translators reflect on their work, there is still a common perception that translation theory is of little or no value for the practice of translation. With the backing of a survey among professional translators, this study attempts to show trends in the development of translation theory. Many practitioners feel the theory is irrelevant to their work but believe it does not need to be so. Not enough is being done to show practitioners, both in the field and in the classroom, that the value of theory is, for example, in giving them conceptual tools with which to reflect on their work and solve translation problems. The tension between descriptive translation studies and prescriptive translation studies is examined. After decades of research, debate and writing, there is still much disagreement among scholars about meaning, equivalence, translation as a science and as a viable activity at all, and fidelity vs. freedom in translation. Risks that are real in modern theorising about translation include becoming prescriptive while advocating for descriptive translation studies, and perpetrating cultural subversion against the source language while advocating for cultural transfer to the target language. It is possible for theorists to guide and suggest while allowing the translator to have the final choice in the translation act. Theory should be based on a wider variety of examples, genres and cultures. Finally, assessment criteria both for the classroom and the workplace need to be clearer. Recommendations are supplied for remedying the perception of theory, improving classroom practice and improving conditions for translators.



Preface

This project was born out of a long-recognised interest in studying and in some small way contributing to the debate on the gap between theorists and practitioners in the field of translation, and enriching my own knowledge of the state of the art and the underlying theory, both old and recent.

Expected difficulties include sourcing practitioners, as many are serving in an ad hoc capacity without the relevant formal qualifications, and many translation bureaus position themselves within communications companies and other corporates rather than as independent companies. One way of overcoming this, which was used for this project, was to network by email among language practitioners in private practice, in the corporate world, in the public service and in academia. These include editors and translators at Nedbank, Standard Bank, the Western Cape Education Department, the University of South Africa, the National Language Service within the National Department of Arts and Culture, and former colleagues in the language industry.

I would like to acknowledge the respondents for taking time out from their busy schedules to assist with this project, my family for their patience while I was taking time away from them, and my employer and supervisors for understanding my need to be away from work at times to focus on my research.

Last but not least, thank you to the academic staff at Wits University, and in particular my academic supervisor and Head of the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies, Professor Alice Leal, for their patience, guidance and deep wisdom.

I am deeply grateful to everyone for their contribution, and to the Almighty for giving me strength to carry on and finish this race.



Introduction

Background

As a translator with some 30 years of practical experience, I have become increasingly concerned about what I initially felt was the limited value of translation theory in South African university curricula for practical translation, whether in the translation of poetry and other “high literature” or for professional translation in the workplace, and about the ability or willingness of practitioners to apply the theory to their practice. The intention with this proposed research project is to focus specifically on the impact of translation theory, as taught in our institutions, on practising translation professionals, with a brief overview of the historical development of literary and technical translation theory.

To give some context: At one university included in the present research, the MA curriculum consists of basically three components: a practical translation component made up of mostly technical translations from a language of your choice into English, a literary theory component and, in the second year, a longer research report, which means there is little or no direct connection between practice and theory. At another university of which the researcher is aware and which offered Bachelor’s and Honours degrees in Translation in the 1980s, students were given a similar mix of almost exclusively technical translation practice and a mostly literary theory component but with some technical translation theory thrown in. Back in the 1980s, there was very little theoretical training to guide the practical exercises. However, the teachers tended to give more detailed feedback in the interests of improving quality. One major factor contributing to the difference that comes to mind is that, in the 1980s, there was no Covid-19 and far more direct teacher–student contact; but this does not seem to be sufficient to justify the gap that exists between theory and practice.

An effective translation approach requires both practical and theoretical training, and translators are expected to apply such an approach to their work. However, there is often a disconnect between the theories that are taught and the practice of translation, and between theorists and practitioners. Therefore, the aim of the present project is to establish whether



this gap between theory and practice can be closed. Specifically, the aim is to propose a general but reasonably practical framework that will give students of translation at least the following choices:

1. A mix of literary translation theory and technical translation theory together with a practical component made up of a corresponding mix of literary and technical translation.
2. A technical translation component with a corresponding technical translation theory component.
3. A literary translation component with corresponding literary translation theory component.

Some of the questions that this study will address based on a review of as wide as possible a range of literature and with the aid of input from practising translators and terminologists in the South African context specifically are these:

- How relevant is translation theory as taught in university curricula to the practice of translation, and how important do translation professionals consider it to be?
- To what extent do practitioners apply translation theory to their work?
- Do practitioners clearly see the relevance, if shown at academic level, of translation theory to their work?
- What tools do practitioners have or what tools can be given to enable them to apply to their work the theory they have learned?

Other questions that will undergird the present project include those raised by Andrew Chesterman, a theorist, and Emma Wagner, a translator. Does theory even have to be relevant? Is music theory supposed to make musicians and composers make better music? Is literary theory supposed to make poets and authors write better? Chesterman (2002, p. 1) concedes that, in some disciplines, theory is supposed to improve practice, but not so in fields such as music and translation, where theorists tend to be averse to being prescriptive. He regards it as an assumption "that translation theory SHOULD have this aim" of helping translation practitioners, but he also regards it as an assumption worth pondering (emphasis original).



Ironically, Chesterman (2002, pp. 9-11) becomes prescriptive very early in the debate by providing a list of ways in which the translator should translate, and he goes even further, suggesting that the translation should improve on the original and that it should be clearer. This, however, raises further questions. If the translation is clearer than the original, has it changed the original at all? Has it not rather given an impression of clarity that is not in the original? This is a choice many translators have faced and continue to face. When dealing directly with real-time authors, for example, the translator can usually ask permission to reword the original more clearly and, if necessary, more correctly. It must also be added here that, at times, the translation *has to* be clearer or more explicit than the original, whether the original was unclear or not.

For example, I have recently had to translate the term “third-party unpaid”, which does not mean the third party has not been paid but rather means “third-party unpaid item”, that is, “a third party has not made payment [to our client]”. To those working in the industry the term made perfect sense, but not so in Afrikaans, which needs to have the implied “item” to be made explicit. It was therefore translated as “derdeparty onbetaalde item”. The word “television” is another example. In English this literally means “viewing from afar”, just like “Fernseher” in German, except the viewing is not from a distance. You are seeing, just a few feet away, an image of a reality that may be thousands of kilometres away. In Afrikaans this word is translated more accurately as “beeldradio” or “image(-transmitting) radio”.¹

This study will briefly analyse these issues and others that emerge from the debate between Chesterman and Wagner, assess how much they were able to agree on and establish whether any further agreement can be found.

Objectives

The objectives of the proposed research project are at least twofold:

- (a) To arrive at a more optimal alignment between theory and practice that will help ensure that theory as taught will be relevant and practical, and that practitioners are

¹ Admittedly the word “beeldradio” has not gained much traction since it was created, so the transliteration “televisie” continues to be used.



able to find such relevance and apply translation theory in practice and even improve their translation competencies; and

- (b) To gauge perceptions of translation theory among a selected group of practitioners and establish whether they find translation theory to be important at all.

Many of the ideas and concepts described in the present study come from existing translation theories of thinkers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, who dealt extensively with the nature of translation and the status of translations, Walter Benjamin, Lawrence Venuti, Anthony Pym, Andrew Chesterman, Gideon Toury and Ernst-August Gutt. The ideas of theorists such as these will therefore be explored and used as a theoretical base for this study.

An important additional aim of the study is to solicit feedback from practitioners (translators and terminologists) through a survey about their understanding of translation theory and its relevance to translation practice, and to use this feedback to suggest ideas for the teaching of practice-oriented theory and to propose ideas for improving translation practice and making greater use of translation theory in practice.



Chapter 1

Theoretical framework

Brief history

Jeremy Munday (2001, p. 5) has remarked that the study of translation as an academic subject effectively only started around the middle of the 20th century. He goes on to say that, until then, only a very small number of writers have, in the words of George Steiner, said “anything fundamental or new” about the subject and that modern theoreticians agree these writers used vague, subjective and highly normative criteria by which to judge translation.

In reaction, modern theoreticians since the second half of the 20th century have attempted to put translation theory on a more scientific footing (2001, p. 29). The subject of this present research is a subcategory of the wider debate but rather an important one. First raised by Levý in 1965, it was addressed more recently by Chesterman and Wagner (2002), Leal (2014) and others, and it concerns the question of the usefulness of theory for the practice of translation.

Questions to be addressed

An important publication, the result of a dialogue between theorist Andrew Chesterman and translator Emma Wagner (2002), goes a long way in addressing questions raised in this present project as well as several others regarding the relevance and usefulness of translation theory for the translator. These include the following:

- Have theorists produced anything of relevance for translators or the clients of the translators?
- Does translation theory help one become a better translator? Should it?
- Does it improve the worth and self-esteem of the translation profession? (2002, p. 1)
- Is translation part of humanities, natural science or applied science? Chesterman (2002, p. 7) asks but stops short of answering this particular question, saying instead that translation theory can offer a set of conceptual tools “for mental problem solving, or for the development of the translator’s self-image, or even for the enhancement of job satisfaction”. He makes no mention of the possibility that these



tools could be used for problem-solving in acts of translation, a connection that Wagner does make.

- Should the translator be visible or invisible, and should he/she enjoy a status comparable to that of the author? (2002, pp. 27-38)

Descriptive or prescriptive?

Chesterman (2002, p. 2) states that most modern translation theorists find the view of translation practitioners expecting theorists to tell them how they can do their jobs better to be “odd”, but he bases it on the assumption that the “telling” is automatically prescriptive and does not seem to consider that it may be descriptive or suggestive, so that the practitioner is able to make the final decision about which option to accept, which to reject and which to adapt to the situation at hand, a view that Hermans and Toury support (1999, p. 91). Also, surely, the option of reflecting on the situation and the theory and adapting according to need would even allow the practitioner to enrich and add to the theoretical base?

Wagner (2002, p. 4) goes as far as to say that even prescription may not be such a bad thing and that most translators would welcome it, although she sees it not as absolute law but as “concrete advice and guidelines, even doctrines, as long as they are practical and realistic”.

The gulf between theorists and practitioners

Among Wagner’s main concerns (2002, p. 3) seems to be the practice among theorists of indulging in highly philosophical and “difficult” questions such as whether translation is possible, along with the practice of basing their theory on a few selected examples of translation events.

These concerns are valid, as will be demonstrated below, but one example will be used initially to illustrate. Leal (2014, p. 55) cites translator Vera Pereira’s anecdote about being unable at times to tell which of two different translations of the same text was the correct one and at times finding better solutions than even the original author had suggested. The author (2014, p. 56) then concludes that “Pereira’s example of the two different translations of the same



text and the unproven authority of the author illustrates the comments of the other interviewees² who defend the awareness-raising character of translation theory”.

Leal’s point about awareness creation through theory is of course undeniable, but it is significant that Pereira does not appear to provide details about the translation problems, the number of problems or the sense in which the original author’s solutions were poorer than her own. Even if she had, however, and even if her assessment of her own solutions versus the author’s was correct, this assessment would not necessarily be applicable to every translation event or to every original author/translator situation. The fact that certain selected words and phrases may be difficult to translate between Language A and Language B should not be overshadowed by the abundant evidence of other words and phrases that are being and have for thousands of years been translated quite effectively between A and B and between many other language pairs.

A somewhat puzzling concept, which both Chesterman and Wagner espouse (2002, p. 11), is that of improving the original text. They stop short of explaining this, but it is possible that Chesterman meant “improving *on*” the original rather than actually improving the original itself because he correctly asks, “If a translation (of a non-literary text) ends up being clearer than the original, so what?” Stating something clearer in the TL than it was in the ST is not improving the ST because that remains unchanged, being an historical document, “final, fixed and immutable” as Wagner (2002, p. 80) herself says.

Translator creativity

Another important question that will be addressed is the translator’s licence to be creative. With reference to the example of Clarence Jordan’s Cotton Patch Bible, Chesterman (2002, p. 104) cites it as “an ideologically motivated translation strategy” and as “a kind of extreme adaptation”, but Wagner (2002, p. 105) declares herself unqualified to judge it and her views to be irrelevant. She is satisfied that the translator was simply following company policy and

² A reference to interviews with professional translators as described in Benedetti & Sobral (2003/2007).



calls him “a true professional”. Were both Chesterman and Wagner being too gracious? This Bible translation places the events of the New Testament in the context of the Black Liberation Movement in the United States. It seems fair, for the purpose of reaching a new market, to replace “Jesus commanded them” with “Jesus held a briefing session”, “the Gentiles” with “the people of the world”, “city of the Samaritans” with “the black ghetto” and “the kingdom of heaven” with “THE GOD MOVEMENT” (capital letters original). Less effective is replacing “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” with “the deluded racists of the nation”, “staves” with “toilet kit” and “Sodom and Gomorrah” with “Paris and Berlin”.

The key issues

A serious problem that seems to be ubiquitous in scholarly literature in the field of translation studies is the tendency to generalise and make absolute statements about “sameness”, translatability, equivalence, meaning transfer and so on. Thus Bassnett-McGuire (1991, p. 29) says, “Equivalence in translation, then, should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between two target language versions of the same text, let alone between two source languages and the target language version”. The comment is fair but seems too absolute. How she arrives at this conclusion is unclear, and she makes no attempt to define “sameness”. We have to discount sameness of language for obvious reasons, but does it mean sameness of meaning, sameness of style and register, sameness of the overall TL product in relation to the overall SL text (this again goes without saying as languages differ in many ways, though not in every way, with regard to how they express themselves) or sameness in some words, phrases, idioms and expressions? As far back as 1964, Nida (2004, p. 153) made it clear that, while the search for equivalence was possible, he never understood equivalence to be absolute:

Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail.



Much of the descriptivist literature reviewed for this study either fails to recognise or, for whatever reason, is silent on the fact that sameness itself is a relative term that needs to be defined. Halverson (1997, p. 210) recognises the problem, arguing convincingly that sameness needs to be defined both in terms of nature and degree, concluding that sameness is “gradable”. More recently, however, Kenny (2009, p. 96) said that proponents of equivalence-based theories of translation “now define equivalence as a relationship between” two texts, an ST and a TT, and also between parts of STs and TTs.

Leal (2014, pp. 17-18) cites Benedetti (a translator) and Britto (a professor of translation studies) as examples of thinkers favouring the idea that translation theory should govern over and systematise translation practice, and Aubert and Barbosa and others as examples of those for whom the main value of theory is not so much to be practice-oriented but rather to raise awareness and to give translators the power to reflect on their work and to give them confidence in their decision making.

The relevance and usefulness of translation theory will also be considered from the standpoint of other disciplines as suggested by Chesterman’s response. For example, from the medical field comes this assertion by Davidoff et al (2015, p. 228):

Put simplistically, improvers-practitioners, managers and others at the sharp end are interested in theory to the extent that it can help them do their work better. If they want theory at all, it is for its potential in helping them design and implement interventions with the greatest possible impact in their particular context

The role of assessment, which is a necessary part of formulating a theory of translation that is relevant and useful, will be considered, along with the question of who the typical readers of translators are and whether their needs should not be considered also. The tension between the prescriptive approach and the descriptive needs to be dealt with: technical translators typically make use of technical dictionaries and other prescriptive sources, and while the same clearly does not hold true for literary translation, it is fair to ask to what extent such an



approach might work here too. Among other topics we will consider the “dialogue” between Bassnet and Nikolarea about the importance of the performance of drama in helping us understand drama, a theoretical issue that can aid literary translators in their task (Nikolarea 2002).

Context has a major role to play as a factor in relevance theory. Gutt (1991, p. 25) says the fact that there is sometimes a difference in meaning between linguistic expressions and what is actually conveyed on specific occasions can be accounted for by the element of context. Also to be considered here is cultural context, particularly in light of Fotheringham’s (2021, p. 270) suggestion that there should be an African theory of literature and how this would improve the translation of literature into and from African languages and contribute towards the development of African literature.

Two other related issues also raised by Leal (2014, p. 56) are that of innate vs. taught competencies and that of inadvertent assimilation of taught theory. Davidoff et al (2015) place the responsibility for making theoretical grounding explicit squarely on the practitioner. While noting that practitioners “always work from implicit assumptions and rationales, whether or not they do so consciously”, they also assert that the key challenge for practitioners is “to make explicit the informal and formal theories they are actually using”. How this is to be done they do not clarify, except to list the kinds of theories one can draw from. Is it reasonable to expect practitioners to keep, refer to and annotate their translations with the various theories they applied to their work and, for the sake of detail, to different parts of their work? Is there scope here for such grounding to be moved earlier, when the translator is in training? Or perhaps the collaboration between theorists, practitioners and academia is a matter of joint responsibility, an option that this present researcher supports and found support for in the literature as will be shown later. For a start, consider a remark by Pujadas (2022, p. 238) with reference to translation quality assessment (TQA):

The authors refer to a study carried out by Huertas Barros and Vine (2017), who found that, worryingly, most of the UK universities surveyed did not believe that contemporary industry TQA was relevant in the academic context. Unfortunately, this provides



irrefutable evidence of the still undeniable gap between academia and industry, as well as the great need for this gap to be bridged.

Not only did the Barros and Vine study expose the resistance of academia to translation quality assessment, but Barros and Vine lamented the gap that exists between theory and practice and acknowledged a need to close the gap.

Status of the translator: visible or invisible?

A controversial question, especially with regard to literary translation as its purpose is so different from that of technical translation, is that of the status of the translator and the translation. Does the translator become invisible or a new author? An important distinction almost completely absent from the literature dealing with this topic is translator visibility in the sense of interfering and intervening in and manipulating language, content and form during the act of translation, and visibility in the sense of enjoying credit and recognition. Venuti (2008, p. 1) does make the distinction, but he calls the translator intervention aspect “an illusionistic effect of discourse”.

The first part touches on the debate about fidelity and equivalence. Does the translator adhere faithfully to the meaning and form of the original or translate sense-for-sense? Can the translator exercise creativity as Clarence Jordan did with the Cotton Patch Bible? Is the translator allowed to be clearer and more elegant than the original author? Can the translator correct errors in the original and how is this to be done? Wagner (2002, p. 31) suggests five things the translator could opt for:

1. Translate the error and do nothing about it.
2. Translate but insert a (sic).
3. Automatically correct in translation but not draw attention to the error in the original.
4. Correct overtly (correct the error and put in a translator’s note drawing attention to the error in the original).
5. Correct fully (correct the error both in the translation and in the original).



These all seem to be reasonable solutions, although number five probably requires some kind of footnote – some errors are historical and the original can no longer be corrected because the author is no longer available.

The second part of the visibility distinction has to do with recognition. Chesterman (2002, p. 27) refers to a 1998 newspaper article lamenting the lack of recognition given to translators for making great literature accessible and making the valid point that the books of the writer in question, Jose Saramago, who had just been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, “could only be read by most people, including the Nobel jury, because they had been translated”. Why the need to distinguish? Because the translator’s invisibility within the text may be easier to accept than invisibility as a new creator for a new audience. Wagner (2002, p. 27) acknowledges that literary translators deserve to have their names on the cover along with the author’s but insists that this would not solve the problem, which is that of lack of appreciation and of professional recognition. As for non-literary translators, not only they but often even the original authors, such as drafters of legislation, regulations, instruction booklets and political speeches, are generally invisible (2002, p. 28). But a (literary) translator who comes up with something new, even though it is based on someone else’s original work, deserves to be recognised for the creative effort.

The value of formal training

A fundamental issue that this study will seek to address through the survey and will suggest calls for in-depth research is whether translators need to be formally trained in order to be successful and if so, why so many interpreters and translators are employed successfully even without formal qualifications. Anecdotal evidence has for years suggested that, in South Africa, the vast majority of court interpreters have no formal qualifications at all, and yet many of them continue to function with some effectiveness.

Dealing with different genres

Another crucial distinction that needs to be made clear to translators-in-training is between literary and non-literary genres, and how these can be dealt with in translation. Thus Walter



Benjamin (2004, p. 75) reflects on the purpose of an original literary work. Is it merely to convey information? He calls this assumption, “the hallmark of bad translations” (Harry Zohn’s translation), adding that the essence of a work is what it contains in addition to information, something more mysterious and poetic, so that to reproduce it, the translator would have to be a poet himself. There is a difference between a monologue by Hamlet and a recipe for cupcakes, and between chiastic structure in classical literature and directions to the nearest police station. Everyday prose is usually simple in structure with only one layer of meaning, and necessarily so (for example, it would be extremely dangerous to have to follow ambiguous instructions when building a nuclear device or creating a chemical compound for treating a serious illness), but a literary work has at least the following characteristics:

- It has a defined and often named structure (novel, Shakespearean sonnet, short story, drama, poem, limerick).
- It is intended by the author to possess aesthetic value and multiple levels of interpretation.
- It is deliberately written with enough technical skill for it to be recognised as “high” literature.
- It is often part of the work of a recognised writer.³

Although contemporary views try to blur the distinction between literary and non-literary texts, these attempts are not completely convincing and the distinctions remain as sharp as ever. One such attempt was by Stanley Fish (1980, pp. 322-323), who uses the example of how he deceived a group of students into thinking that a list of names left on the writing board by a previous group was actually a religious poem and sparked a vigorous debate about its poetic qualities and meaning.

What is somewhat obscured in the account is whether the students were actually looking at a poem or something they were tricked into thinking was a poem. The fact that they thought they saw meaning in the name is no evidence that their interpretation was valid or that “acts of recognition, rather than being triggered by formal characteristics, are their source” (1980, p. 326). As Fish (1980, p. 325) himself admits, “A text cannot be overwhelmed by an irresponsible reader and one need not worry about protecting the purity of a text from a

³ Partly based on Robert Stecker’s description in his book, *What is Literature?*



reader's idiosyncrasies". It is fair to ask whether it is true, as Fish declares, that the students' knowledge of what a poem was led them to interpret the list of names as a poem, or if they would have simply seen it as a list of more or less familiar names and wondered what the list meant rather than concluding that it was a poem. Fish (1980, p. 306) also makes an assumption here that is incorrect in my view, that when someone's understanding of a situation or an utterance changes, its meaning has changed.

Whether one agrees with Benjamin or not, it is evident that a literary work is indeed more than just information, more than just a collection of words and sentences conveying surface meaning. I can say, "The window is open" and mean nothing more than that statement of fact, or I could be hinting that someone should close it, or I could be making a sarcastic comment to someone who repeatedly leaves it open. A literary work uses words and sentences, but also employs a high level of skill, imagery, structure, recurring themes and whatever other literary devices are necessary to achieve its purposes, and the purposes may include not only conveying information but also inspiring, stirring up emotion, evoking memories, persuading and calling to action. And all of these elements must be somehow reflected in the translation if possible. Vermeer (2012, p. 192) says, "Language is part of a culture" and adds that "It is thus not to be expected that merely 'trans-coding' a source text, merely 'transposing' it into another language, will result in a serviceable *translatum*" (emphasis original).

Benjamin argues that "no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original" and yet, by virtue of translatability, "the original is closely connected with the translation" (2000, p. 16), by which presumably he meant that the author did not write the original with a translation in mind and the existence of the translation has no effect on the original. And even this connection, says Benjamin, is not direct – by the time the original is translated, some of its words may have changed meaning and can no longer be literally translated. Furthermore, as Reiss (2000, p. 162) points out, the translation itself may have to be adapted from time to time as the target language, too, changes over time. This would certainly make sense to Bible translators and readers because it is widely acknowledged that there are many words in the 400-year-old King James Bible, for example, that have changed meaning and now have to be replaced with modern equivalents or explained in footnotes



where no equivalents exist.⁴ Whether it was Benjamin's intention to make the translation of no importance in an absolute sense is not completely clear, but it is unlikely, seeing that he saw the translation as a continuation of the life of the original because "a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability" (2000, p. 16).

Foreignisation or fluency?

This study will reflect on the contributions of such theorists as Pannwitz, Schleiermacher and Benjamin, who had similar ideas about target-language enrichment by borrowing "foreignness" from the source language. (Venuti 2000: 12; also Venuti 1998; Suh 2002:51; and Basil Hatim who saw the role of the translator as that of "an active text producer"). The dichotomy between foreignization and domestication was developed independently by both Schleiermacher and Goethe in the 1800s and was more recently taken up by Venuti, for example in "Translation, Community, Utopia" (2000, pp. 468-488). In this regard, Chesterman (2002, p. 83) concedes that "not all translations necessarily aim to sound totally natural in the target language; there may be more important priorities". He (2002, p. 18) does caution, however, that such foreignisation, with its emphasis on creativity, should be applied strictly to literary translation and not to non-fiction translation.

Curricula for translation studies

A key issue when it comes to the relevance of translation theory for translation practice is the role of curricula in creating an explanatory and facilitative link between theory and practice. Fotheringham (2021, p. 265) says that educational design research is:

a theoretically-oriented, interventionist, collaborative, responsive and iterative research methodology which seeks to find practicable solutions to design problems, with the goal of sharing the resulting designs and the process that led to their elaboration with a wider

⁴ A reasonable question to ask, however, is whether such a translation update is absolutely necessary or just a preference for some, because the KJV is still very much in circulation and preferred by many readers. We also don't update (translate into modern English) such classics as the works of Shakespeare, at least not as a necessity.



community of practitioners, and thus contribute to the development of their practice (Faste and Faste 2012).

He also sees it as “a means of disseminating useful ideas among a community of practice with shared challenges (Ezer 2009; McKenney and Reeves 2012)”. Recognising the importance of making theoretical resources available to aspiring literary translators, Fotheringham (2021, p. 266) points out there is a significant amount of literature addressing “the pitfalls inherent in the translation of literatures from marginalised languages and contexts into more dominant languages”.

The search for a general theory and common ground

The present study will also propose that, in any attempt to define this relationship between theory and practice, the issue should be viewed as broader than merely that of theory being prescriptive vs. descriptive in relation to translation practice. It might involve recommendations and suggestions from both the “ivory tower” and the “wordface”, to borrow imagery from Chesterman & Wagner (2002, p. 1) and evidence, in the form of actual examples, will be advanced that solutions may be found in a pragmatic, multipronged approach determined by the purpose and intended audience of the translation in question.



Chapter 2

Translator status and translator creativity

Translator and translation status

Translators historically have been considered secondary to original authors (unless they themselves were authors in their own right, translating their own or someone else's work). For the past few decades there has been a great deal of debate about the status of the translator and of the translation as a product. Thus Loffredo & Perteghella (2006, p. 2) have remarked as follows:

... contemporary explorations and experimental practices, often still at the margins of the common perception of translation, reveal how translation is being rethought and redefined in the light of 'creativity' and as a form of 'writing'. Creative writing, as a new critical setting, has increasingly become the next contender field promising an insight into the process of translation and, ultimately, an innovative and stimulating 'project of translation'. This fresh perspective can be explained by the significance increasingly bestowed upon the creativity inherent in rewritings, such as literary translation, and upon the mental processes occurring during these rewritings.

As we shall see in this chapter, numerous thinkers favour this idea, that literary translation in particular should be seen as a product of creativity in its own right, rather than merely the result of mimicking an original.

Creativity in translation

Paschalis Nikolaou (2006, p. 19) acknowledges that the discipline of translation studies has come of age in terms of perspectives from diverse fields, including cultural studies, but adds that the aspect of creativity remains relatively unexplored:

Why should it take so long before we can speak of a 'creative turn' in translation studies, as we witness a synod of literary, linguistic, cognitive and other perspectives ... freshly



and diversely focusing, in their allied plurality, on how it feels to be translating, on why translation exceeds what is asked of it in so many ways?

He does concede that frameworks for assessing creativity in translation are “not that far away” (2006, p. 19) and that there is a move towards defining creativity.

Frawley (2000, p. 251) rejects the notion that translation is merely a question of crossing languages or that of identity or synonymy. You can be fluent in two languages and still not be a good translator in that language pair. Rather, translation is a question of recodification. Frawley makes an important distinction between one-on-one equivalence and dynamic equivalence when he says the identity inevitably found across linguistics codes “is actually useless in translation”, adding that we have to purge ourselves of the notion that “identity somehow *saves* translation”. Here specifically, says Frawley (2000, p. 256), is the distinction, that “universal grammar and the identity it entails are aspects of linguistic competence, whereas translation is a matter of linguistic performance”.

Xavier Lin (2006, p. 97) acknowledges that translators have only recently started to be regarded as textual creators in their own right, adding, “One domain where translators can perform their art is composed, as Theodore Savory puts it, of [t]he existence of possible alternatives between which the translator must make his own choice’ (1957:27)”. Lin (2006, p. 97) cautions, however, that there is more at stake than a mere choice between alternatives, suggesting that the real art begins when the signs used in the text, and their physical properties, have to be reproduced. For example, the significant differences between languages and between cultures “render poetry translation more than just an activity of choice-making”. It is these gaps between languages and between cultures, says Lin (2006, p. 97), that translators have to bridge by using their own creativity so that poetry translation becomes less an issue of “mere replacement” and more about “recreation”.

Savory (1968, p. 26) boldly states that the translator’s task is actually much harder than the original author’s because, while authors are free to use any words in their native tongue to express thoughts or describe things, translators are limited by that very choice of words to



find the nearest equivalent. On the other hand, there are translators, and the theorists who agree with them, who have no problem creating something almost completely new and only loosely based on the original, as attested to by the Cotton Patch Bible, a “translation” that deliberately, to make a political point, changes the setting of the New Testament, placing the events in the context of the Black Liberation Movement in the United States, an example pointed to by Chesterman (2002, pp. 104-105).

Chesterman, in a paper written with Rosemary Arrojo (2017, p. 17), remarks:

In general, essentialism claims that meanings are objective and stable, that the translator’s job is to find and transfer these and hence to remain as invisible as possible. Non-essentialism, on the other hand, basically claims that meanings (including the meaning of the concept of ‘translation’) are inherently non-stable, that they have to be interpreted in each individual instance, and hence that the translator is inevitably visible.

In his earlier debate with Wagner, Chesterman (2002, p. 25) had made the same point even more bluntly, saying that meanings are not fixed but “endlessly shifting”, so that “any notion of equivalence goes out of the window”, basically leaving the authors dead and the translators free to do as they please and be visible. However, Wagner’s (2002, p. 25) reply was equally blunt: “It is not particularly helpful for theorists to tell us that translation is impossible or that perfect equivalence is unattainable. Let alone that words are meaningless and there is nothing objectively there”. Donoghue’s (1992, p. 37) remark about critical theorists easily applies to translation theorists too, and specifically with regard to the transfer of meaning:

They tell me that nothing can be established, but they show no misgiving in producing a tone of certitude in the admonition. Having rid themselves and us of certainty, they seem unwilling to act upon the diminished thing or to learn a tentative style from a despair.

But why the extremes? Could the answer not be somewhere in-between? Are we talking about the meanings of words and expressions? If so, it’s possible to concede that some



meanings are stable and others less so. Consider the word “prevent” in the King James Version”. In the 17th century, this word meant “to go before” or “to precede”. Today it means “to stop someone from doing something”, and so the New King James Version and other modern translations use “precede” rather than “prevent”. But for the most part, the language of the KJV still remains perfectly understandable to the modern reader, hence its continued popularity in modern culture. It seems reasonable to conclude that the translator may be visible or invisible, depending on the extent which meanings are stable.

Meaning transfer in translation

Kirsten Malmkjær (1988, p. 25) says that every kind of linguistic communication, including reading and translation, is an act of cooperation, which she defines in Coleridge’s words as “willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith”. This touches on the issue of meaning and the role of the author, the translator and the reader in creating it. Davis (2001, p. 3) cites Jacques Derrida, the founder of deconstructionism, as cautioning against “attempts to sever meaning from context”, an issue that will be dealt with in Chapter 5. Many theorists have written about the virtual inevitability of the translation act. Thus Lefevere (1992, p. 9) said that “translation is the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and ... it is potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin”.

Regarding translation, Davis (2001, p. 16) goes on to say, “The proper name delineates precisely what it is about language that, on the one hand, makes perfect translation impossible, and on the other hand, makes translation not only possible but necessary”.⁵ This echoes the thoughts of George Steiner (2004, p. 193), who as early as 1975 said that the elicitation and transfer of meaning in translation is a fourfold process. First comes trust – the translator believes there is something in the original text worth reading and translating (2004, p. 193). Next is aggression, as the act of accessing the original text and appropriating its meaning is in a sense an act of violence (2004, p. 194). The third movement is that of

⁵ Loffredo & Perteghella (2006, p. 4) take this idea even further, saying that, “‘translation’ as a form of writing is always already inherent in the source text”.



incorporation of the meaning of the original into the target language with its existing semantic field (2004, p. 195). The final movement, what Steiner calls “the piston-stroke”, is that of restitution or restoration or compensation (2004, p. 195). A good translation may not be an exact reproduction. It may sometimes go too far, or not far enough. But if it falls short of the original, “the authentic translation makes the autonomous virtues of the original more precisely visible”, and if it surpasses the original, “[it] infers that the source-text possesses potentialities, elemental reserves as yet unrealized by itself” (2004, p. 197).

Steiner therefore did not see translation as a hopeless task – challenging, yes, but possible if done right. The risk as he saw it was that translator may fail in their task of re-creating the original appropriately in the target language because they have been “mastered and made lame” by the meaning imported because “the inhaled voice of the foreign text had come to choke their own” (2004, p. 195). For him, fidelity was not literalism but a restoration of balance. This seems to be as close as he comes to calling it dynamic equivalence. Even further back, in 1964, Nida (2004, p. 156) said that a translation aiming at dynamic equivalence “aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture” but still allows for formal or structural equivalence depending on the need of the target reader.

Translators are trained to translate. Evidently, translation therefore is possible. Thousands of years of evidence prove this, and as Nord (1997, p. 39) says, “teachers who have been trained as translators or who have worked in professional environments usually know that different contexts call for different translation solutions; they have an intuitive awareness of functionalism”.

According to Wilke (1992, p. 24), the Russian Formalists asserted that meaning is found not outside the text but inside it, while the proponents of Aesthetics Reception found meaning in the receiver, the reader of the text, rather than the text itself. Thus Wolfgang Iser (2007, p. 1002) says that “the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be



completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized”.

It is worth considering and comparing different criteria that different theorists have proposed for assessing different translation approaches. Thus Savory (1968, p. 26) suggests three questions worth considering in the assessment of a translation’s effectiveness:

1. What does the author say?
2. What does he mean?
3. How does he say it?

By saying this, Savory evidently does not mean to be prescriptive. On the contrary, he says, “The writing of the original author may be blunt or subtle, hesitant or fluent, sober or cheerful, majestic or paltry; and the translation may be any of these according to the wit and skill of the translator” (1968, p. 28).

Xavier Lin (2006, p. 99) adds a few more examples of his own. One is André Lefevere (1975), who proposed seven strategies including adopting elements from the SL where possible, and also phonemic units; the literal meaning; the metre and rhyme of the ST but as a basis on which to build the TT; adapting the ST into a different genre. Another is Robert Bly’s (1970): eight stages of translation. Lin also references Yan Fu’s triad of translation criteria, i.e. “*Xin*, *Da* and *Ya* (literally ‘faithful, fluent, elegant’)”.

Are there limits to freedom in translation?

How far should the idea of translation as re-creation proposed at the beginning of this chapter be taken? Lin (2006, p. 103) cites the example of Stambler’s translation of the poetry of seventh-century poet Han Shan, where Stambler “even goes so far as to substitute an event from his personal life for an image in the original text because he believes that both the event and the poem share the same emotional kernel”. Lin (2006, p. 107) justifies this, referencing



the Chinese approach to translation, by saying that “what matters more in a poem is the beauty beyond the text instead of merely the text itself”.

In the area of legal translation, which one would think does not generally involve such creative challenges as those faced by literary translation, Wagner (2002, p. 8) seems to suggest an even more radical approach, but in the name of readability rather than re-creation, when she compares these two English translations to the French original:

French original	Translation A	Translation B
Le rapport biannuel sur la coordination des activités en faveur des PME et de l'artisanat rendra compte des progrès accomplis notamment grâce à l'établissement et à la comparaison de données sur le taux de participation des PME aux programmes communautaires tant en nombre de projets qu'en volume budgétaire et à l'introduction, le cas échéant, de mesures spécifiques susceptibles d'augmenter la participation des PME.	The twice-yearly report on the coordination of activities to assist SMEs and the craft sector will detail the progress achieved, particularly through compiling and comparing data on the participation rate of SMEs in Community programmes – in terms both of the number of projects and the budgetary volume involved – and through the introduction, where appropriate, of special measures to increase the participation of SMEs.	Our success or failure will be measured by the twice-yearly report on action to help small businesses. This will show exactly how many of them are involved in Community programmes – both the number of projects, and the financial volume they represent. The report will also chart the impact of any special measures that might boost applications from small businesses.

Wagner judges Translation B to be more readable than A, and Chesterman too is less than gracious to Translator A, saying that the phrase “particularly through compiling and comparing data” is a mistranslation (when it’s really just ambiguous but admittedly still a poor translation). He adds that the concept of transposition “seems to be an unknown idea to Translator A” and directly thereafter admits that A actually did transpose a few nouns without clarifying that there really weren’t that many nouns to transpose to verbs in the first place. Also, Translation B hardly qualifies as a translation since it adds items that are not present or even implied in the original (“success or failure” for “progress” and “exactly how many are involved” for “the participation rate of”, freely renders “rendra compte” (literally “will detail”, “will give an account of”) as “will measure”, completely omits relevant information such as “the coordination of activities” and “the budgetary volume”.

The examples aside, even if we acknowledge the point Chesterman and Wagner are trying to make (that faithfulness to the original is not as important as naturalness in the TL), it seems fair to answer that perhaps the issue is not about favouring one translation over another but



about allowing for different kinds of translations for different purposes, provided that the intended meaning of the original is retained as far as possible.

The nature of translation

For the purpose of any translation, including literary translation, an important question that needs to be answered is the nature of translation. Leo Hickey (1998, p. 1) said, "In particular, it is now understood that translators do not simply 'say' in one language what somebody or some piece of writing has 'said' in another. Whatever translation is in its entirety, it seems to involve semiotic, linguistic, textual, lexical, social, sociological, cultural and psychological aspects or elements".

It is indisputable that, despite vigorous debate that has spanned decades about whether or not translation is even possible, the practice of translation has been going on for thousands of years, with varying degrees of success. Hickey (1998, p. 2) acknowledges that while certain linguistic elements, such as words and grammar, "appear to disappear or change completely in translation", the semantic element, the meaning, "usually survives the process quite well". Take something as simple as translating numbers between English and Korean. In English one says, "fifty thousand". In Korean there is a word for "fifty" and a word for "thousand" but no Korean would say "fifty thousand" because they also have a word for "ten thousand", so the simplest way to say "fifty thousand" would be 오만 or literally, "five ten thousands". The grammar in Korean is somewhat different from that of the English, but the meaning is retained. Total equivalence may not always be possible, but it certainly is possible enough for translation to have been practised quite satisfactorily for thousands of years. Hickey (1998, p. 2) rightly asks, "[D]oes translation deal with what the original author intended or simply what is expressed by the text?" Or, one might add, does it depend on the scope and purpose of the translation? To the reader who merely wants to know what the original author intended to say, thought equivalence answers the purpose. But if the reader wants to know exactly how the original author said it, perhaps to get a flavour of the thinking processes and culture that the source text comes from, then word-for-word translation serves best.



The approach favoured by Lin and suggested by Chesterman and Wagner is a far cry from the view proposed by Schleiermacher and others. For them, in general terms, what is at stake in the translation of literature is how to strike a balance between faithfulness to the original while giving the target reader (TR) the closest possible approximation of the aesthetic experience he would have had if he had been able to read the original in the source language (SL). In this regard Lefevere (1982, p. 5) says that “translation and translating can never be linked to linguistics alone. Extra-linguistic factors are involved”.

In 1813, Schleiermacher (2004, p. 51) suggested that the translator’s goal should be to give the TL reader “just such an image and just such enjoyment” as reading the work in the SL would have given the SL reader. Also, the translator will note words and associations of ideas that conveyed to him “the first splendor of novelty” (2004, p. 51) and how these have insinuated themselves into the language, and this will determine his impressions from the literary work. All of these things he must then communicate to the SL reader. One of the difficulties of this, Schleiermacher (2004, p. 52) says, is that of maintaining a balance between “fidelity to rhythm and melody” and “fidelity to dialectic and grammar”.

If the translator focuses too much on the subject matter, or what Raffel (1990) calls “the outer meanings”, he might do injustice to the aesthetic elements (2004, p. 52), literary devices where the “inner” meaning is often conveyed, such as rhythm, rhyme, metre, musicality, symbolism and metaphor and a host of figures of speech and even things that are intended to communicate through silence, such as ellipsis. However, if he focuses too much on the aesthetic, the verse, the musicality, etc., he may neglect “the logical element” (2004, p. 53). Schleiermacher’s answer is that the translator must strive for balance (2004, p. 54).

Because languages and the systems of thought that make up each language are so different, sacrifices may have to be made, and “the wise course of action will always be to acquire as much as possible of [the good things of this method] while taking along as little as possible of [the bad]” (2004, p. 54). To achieve this goal, Schleiermacher says, the translator must use language that not only departs from the ordinary but also reflects the foreignness of the original (2004, p. 53). And an important additional benefit is that the TL can be enriched, a



sentiment echoed by Benjamin (2000, p. 75) and also by Pannwitz, who according to Venuti (2000, p. 12) saw translation as “an experimental literary practice, where the translator ‘must broaden and deepen his own language with the foreign one’”.

Schleiermacher’s (2004, p. 49) concern was about how to deal with the relationship between the original writer and the TL reader. He sees two paths open to the translator: “Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him, or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him.” He favoured “foreignisation”, saying that the reader must be given “an inkling, if only a distant one, of the original language and what the work owes to it, and thus some of what he loses for not understanding the original tongue is here compensated” (2004, p. 54).

Pym’s objection to Schleiermacher

Pym (2012, p. 15) doesn’t object outright to Schleiermacher’s position about either moving the reader toward the writer (foreignization) or moving the writer toward the reader (naturalization) through the translation. Rather, his concern is that it’s too dualistic. Why should there be only two possible answers? Why not other translation methods in between?

It is plausible that perhaps Pym missed the implied spectrum of possibilities in-between the two extremes. Schleiermacher seems to have made some allowance in-between by saying, “Either translators leave the writer in peace *as much as possible* ... or they leave the reader in peace *as much as possible*” (Cited in Pym (2012:14), emphasis supplied). He traces this dualism back to Cicero’s “ut interpretes / ut orator (either interpret literally or be an inspiring orator) and Jerome’s “non verbum e verbo sed sensum exprimere de sensu (not word for word but sense for sense) and connects it to a continuing tradition among such theorists as Nida, Newmark, House, Nord and Berman. Pym (2012, p. 15) acknowledges, nevertheless, that “Schleiermacher remains important to the extent that he was able to articulate a version of this binarism that both rich (in its argumentation) and radical (in its conclusion), despite the basic duality”. However, his primary objection is that the false duality elevates language workers to an ethic that is too high – that a specific way of translating is “somehow enough to



open a society to foreigners” (2012, p. 17), by which he means the intention of theorists such as Schleiermacher and Berman is to show the contrast between the reader’s “worst possible world” and the source text’s ideal world, and then assume that good translation will transport the reader from one to the other.

Pym does not make a convincing argument that the dualist theory is this ambitious (although he may have a point that it seems too simplistic). He does not seem to consider the possibility that by “moving” the reader by letting him or her feel the foreignness of the source text, Schleiermacher might have been proposing merely that the reader should be given a glimpse into the world of the original.

Pym (2012, p. 61) suggests that translators are not authors and that, while responsible for the effects of the message, they are not responsible for the content of the message. Here he cites Venuti as probably “the most consistent and vociferous proponent of the translator’s authorship” and advances three proofs for his contention:

1. An author’s position is established by specific words in the text (2012, p. 63). For example, if the translation says “I”, that first-person reference is undeniably to the original author, not to the translator.
2. An author’s beliefs are not necessarily the translator’s beliefs (2012, p. 64).
3. An author is committed to his words; the translator is not, but is required only to be committed to how he or she represented that text (2012, p. 66).

However, while it has to be granted that the translator is not *the* original author, he or she is in a sense *an* original author, producing words and phrases that the original author has not produced. And granted that the translator is not responsible for the content, he or she shares or assumes responsibility within the new readership, and specifically for ensuring that the content is accurately conveyed, as Schleiermacher has envisaged.

Vladimir Nabokov’s 1941 essay, “The Art of Translation”, takes a position similar to Schleiermacher’s view of maintaining foreignness by saying that poetry translation (which would include the poetic aspect of drama) should be faithful to the original rather than a free



recreation in the TL. In response Dudley Fitts (2004, p. 113), the American poet, critic and translator, was severely critical, saying that in poetry translation, “we need something at once less ambitious and more audacious: another poem”. In other words, the translator is overambitious if he thinks he can translate poetry effectively, but at the same time, he should strive to be bold and create a new poem. He must be the poet.

Here we have two opposing views, one allowing and even favouring recreation to the extent of inserting elements not even found in the original, and the other favouring faithfulness to the original to the extent of introducing elements in the TT that have such a strong flavour of the SL that it leaves a “foreignness”. Compromise between these positions is not only possible but also necessary and can even produce highly satisfactory results because there are degrees of difficulty between literary genres and even within genres when it comes to translation. Thus Berman (2000, p. 287) quotes Herman Broch as saying that the novel, in contrast to poetry, is “not a producer, but a consumer of style” and that the novel “applies itself with much less intensity to the duty of looking like a work of art”. Simply put, poetry is far more structured than a novel, and dramatic text would fall somewhere in-between depending on where in the spectrum it is between prose and poetry.

Using Shklovsky’s (2007, p. 778) definition of art, it’s easy to see that poetry and drama create more unfamiliarity, employ more difficult forms, are harder to read and prolong aesthetic perception far more than the novel does. The translator can pick a passage at random from Dickens and have little difficulty, comparatively speaking, in translating it into the TL. Consider, for example, the opening sentence of *Hard Times* (1854, p. 15), a monologue spoken by Gradgrind:

“Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else.”

A competent translator can quite easily render this in Afrikaans as follows:



“Nou, wat ek wil hê, is Feite. Leer hierdie seuns and dogters niks behalwe Feite nie. Feite is al wat ons in die lewe soek. Plant niks anders nie, en roei enigiets anders uit.” (My own translation.)

Pretty much the only literary devices used here are the matter-of-fact tone, the staccato utterances and the capitalisation of “Facts” to indicate the high premium the practical gentleman places on this commodity, and these are fairly easily replicated. The same can’t be said of Shakespeare’s sonnet 18:

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date: ...

The only language challenge here would be the last line and a half, which consist of unfamiliar speech that probably would have been unfamiliar even for everyday usage in Shakespeare’s day. Still, these two lines can be translated with relatively little difficulty. A far bigger challenge would be to translate the language while rendering the same effect in terms of rhyme, assonance, alliteration, pentameter and the musicality of the poem. The translator has to make many difficult choices – to translate as free verse in order to reflect only the outer meaning, to replicate as many of the devices as possible and approximate what can’t be replicated, to recreate in the TL those devices that can’t be replicated or approximated, or any combination of these solutions.

In the end, the translation will be to a greater or lesser degree a new creation, depending on the translator’s approach. What this study proposes is that there has to be some compromise between faithfulness to the original (however this is defined) and the need or desire to create something new in the TL. In other words, we need a balance between what Joseph Che Suh (2002, p. 51) calls “two conflicting developments” that have occurred over the past 25 years – on the one hand, that of continuing to consider literary translation as a process of textual comparison and transfer and, on the other, that of “shifting the focus from the traditional preoccupation with the revered or sacred nature of the source text towards acceptance of the



target text as a product in its own right”. Seeking that balance would be determined at least in part by the purpose and function of the TL text.

Translator invisibility

For context, the term *translator visibility* has been defined (for example, by Hatim) as the extent to which the translator intrudes or intervenes in the translation as a product (2001, p. 45). What criteria should be used to assess the effectiveness and quality of a translation? Should the TT be judged by the fluency and readability of the TL or by how much of the flavour of ST has been retained in the TT, or are the best translation those that convey the meaning of the original the best? Venuti (2008, p. 1) and others see this question against the backdrop of a political agenda, where foreign texts as well as English-language translations are ignored if they fail a supposed “fluency” test. Hatim (2001, p. 45) concludes from this that “an entire translation tradition has evolved in the West to serve imperialistic goals abroad and xenophobic values at home”. This seems to be borne out in South Africa where, according to Walker et al (1995, p. 1), language policy (and, by extension, translation policy) “played a pivotal role in promoting apartheid and, like race and ethnicity, has to be evaluated as a function of white domination and racial discrimination”.

Is meaning stable or unstable?

Arrojo (1998, p. 25) saw great promise in what was then a new trend in translation studies, where there was –

a radical distrust of the possibility of any intrinsically stable meaning that could be fully present in texts or in any form of oral or written discourse and, thus, supposedly recoverable and repeated elsewhere without the interference of the subjects, as well as the cultural, historical, ideological or political circumstances involved.



She goes on (1998, p. 26) to suggest that, without such a stable original held up as the objective to pursue, it is possible to be liberated from the unrealistic expectations and arguments of the past.

Professional translators find this non-essentialist view hard to accept as it is too extreme in its assertion that equivalence is a myth, that faithful translation is impossible and that translators can do as they please – one recalls Wagner's (2002, p. 25) remark: "It is not particularly helpful for theorists to tell us that translation is impossible or that perfect equivalence is unattainable. Let alone that words are meaningless and there is nothing objectively there".

What further muddies the waters is that often the very same theorists who agree with one another that meaning is unstable, cannot agree about what constitutes meaning and where meaning originates from. Hatim (2001, p. 48) takes issue with the deconstructionists and with the idea that meaning is found not in the original but in the translation because supposedly "in translation, it is the original text which is actually dependent upon the translation and not the other way round, since without translation the original would simply remain 'undiscovered'". This seems to be an overly philosophical and denigrating way of viewing the original, almost akin to the colonialist view of continents and civilizations, which are considered "undiscovered" until they are discovered by another civilisation (usually regarded as superior although, admittedly, in the specific dichotomy of translation vs. original, it is the translation that historically was usually the underdog). It is far more reasonable to see the source text as being exposed to an additional audience, having already been read and appreciated in the SL culture.



Chapter 3

Perspective of different language groups in definitions of translation

Defining translation and its classification as a science

George Steiner (1975, p. 295) said, "What we are dealing with is not a science, but an exact art". On the other hand, Pym (1998, p. 156) said that "we have already defined translation in suitably formal terms". It is almost impossible to study translation theory and not discover, almost immediately, how often theorists disagree about how to define "translation" and how many definitions have fallen into disuse or even disrepute. Is translation an art or a science? Should translation theory be descriptive or prescriptive (see Chapter 5), and is it even possible to study it using scientific methods?

Chesterman (2004, p. 34) says translation studies has sought to "escape the bounds of the particular" by looking at linguistic features that relate translations to both the ST and the TL, and it has done so in three ways, which he labels "the prescriptive route" (basically, what translations should or should not do), "the pejorative route" (which focuses on undesirable elements in translation) and "the descriptive route" (which searches for universal features). Each of these three, in his view, has its problems and has made contributions.

Gutt (1998, p. 48) acknowledges that there is no generally accepted definition of translation but rather pessimistically concludes that "there appears to be very little reason to expect that one day a reasonably well-defined and generally accepted notion of translation will emerge". Regarding translation studies as a scientific discipline he says, "Some scholars have suggested the simple, if radical, explanation that translation simply is not open to scientific investigation because it is an art or a skill. By contrast, still others have suggested that our scientific understanding of translation is so poor because it really has not been studied in a proper scientific manner" (2000, p. 2). It should be noted that these sentiments were expressed more than 20 years ago. Although one might have expected a change since then, it is evident that theorists are not much closer to agreement on these issues today than they were then.



Translation at the crossroads of scientific disciplines

In attempting to explain the difficulty of defining translation, Gutt (2000, p. 4) suggests that a new era of multidisciplinary research on translation, while positive, has also proved to be “a serious threat to the very aim for which it has been demanded: that of developing a science of translation”. It was important for translators and translation scholars to acknowledge that the investigation of translation involved not only linguistic but also a number of other factors from other scientific disciplines. Thus Gutt (2000, p. 5) adds, “Since these factors belong to a variety of different areas of life, there is a question whether a comprehensive account of translation in the form of a coherent and homogeneous theory can ever be achieved.”

Wilss (1988, p. 97) noted the lack of direction in terms of assessment of translation quality by saying, “The teaching of translation methods in most cases points out only *that* one has to evaluate and weigh, but not *how* to do it”. This statement was written more than 30 years ago, but it is doubtful that it was completely true even then, as it was already common practice in translation schools to teach students not only to assess quality but also *how* to assess it, even though the criteria have been adapted and expanded since then. What has not been made clear is *why*, and which specific theoretical school of thought should be followed in assessment and in translation method.

Translation, meaning, context and culture

An example, cited by Hatim (2001, p. 14), of a definition no longer in vogue is that of JC Catford, who defines translation as “an operation performed on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another”.

Hatim (2001, p. 14) says that, “According to Catford, we do not ‘transfer’ meaning between languages; we merely ‘replace’ a source language meaning by a target language meaning that can function in the same way in the situation at hand”. Catford distinguishes between formal correspondence and textual equivalence. Formal correspondence is when one adheres closely to the linguistic form of the source text, for example when the translator can find a TL category



that has the same function in the SL, for example by replacing an adjective with an adjective. If this is not possible, the translator aims for textual equivalence, where the TL text is found to be the equivalent in specific instances. For example, an adjective is translated as an adverbial phrase. These are what Catford (1965, p. 15) calls “translation shifts”. This study does not aim to go into any detail regarding objections to Catford. Suffice it to say that, at least in Hatim’s opinion, it oversimplifies translation and language issues and does not cover issues that go beyond the linguistic, such as culture and context, although he does concede that Catford was “no stranger to contextual issues” and that Catford (1965, p. 17) seems to have made a strategic choice to focus on the nature and conditions of translation equivalence. In contrast, Toury (2004, p. 22) suggests that shifts are the norm rather than the exception, and that they are “not just one of many possible features, but rather a *defining feature of translation*”.

Hatim notes Eugene Nida’s (1969, p. 200) *dynamic equivalence* as another important landmark in translation studies. The aim of this approach is to convey the message of the original text in such a way that the response of the TL reader is “essentially like that of the original receptors”, a notion that echoes Schleiermacher’s “just such an image”. A popular example is that of the Biblical title “Lamb of God” for Christ as “Seal of God” in an Eskimo language on the assumption that the TL readers are not familiar the lambs and therefore can’t understand the concept. Hatim (2001, p. 61) also references theorists such as Susan Bassnett, André Lefevere and Mary Snell-Hornby, who urged linguists to move beyond even text as a unit of translation to culture at large.

Thus, for example, Lefevere (1990, p. 18) says of literary translation, “An exchange of signifieds in a kind of intellectual and emotional vacuum, ignoring the cultural, ideological and poetological overtones of the actual signifiers, is doomed to failure”, and Snell-Hornby (1990, p. 84) echoes, “The culturally oriented approach to translation theory has some potential for bridging the gap, and indeed it implicitly embraces all kinds of translation”. On probing further, however, one finds that what they meant is not that it is impossible to say in Language B what was said in Language A from a linguistic perspective, but that language alone will not suffice.



The translator has to translate in context. To use one of Snell-Hornby's (1990, pp. 83-84) examples of a culturally oriented translation:

In Parliament he fought for equality, but *he sent his son to Winchester*.

Im Parlament kämpfte er für die Chancengleichheit, aber seinen eigenen Sohn schickte er auf *eine der englischen Elitschulen*. (Italics original)

Literally, the culturally sensitive part was to replace "Winchester" with "one of the English elite schools", an effect that could just as easily have been achieved by retaining the name of the school and adding a footnote, but it has to be admitted that the explanatory option is easier to read. However, this approach, while not without merit, has the effect of subverting the source culture, which then defeats the purpose of cultural transfer. It also ignores the ability of human beings to adapt and understand across cultures, which is where Schleiermacher goes further, allowing for a "foreignness" to be retained and for target languages and cultures to be enriched through the "foreign" concepts and structures.

Who gets to define "translation"?

Polysystem Theory, popularized from the 1970s onwards, holds that the so-called "shifts" in translation are not translation errors but "part of the process which is naturally embedded in two different text worlds, intellectually, aesthetically and from the perspective of culture at large" (2001, p. 67).

Functionalism, under the general designation of Skopos Theory, emerged in the 1980s as an attempt to focus on the pragmatic purpose of the translation, proposing that "the way the target text eventually shapes up is determined to a great extent by the function, or 'skopos', intended for it in the target context" (2001, p. 74). Chesterman (2002, p. 21) remarks that it is the purpose or skopos of a translation that decides the relationship between the source text and the target text and provides an insight worth further investigation, that with the focus on skopos, "Ideas of *equivalence* as a desirable goal give way to those of *functional adequacy*"



(emphasis original). Pym (2012, p. 5) sees Skopos Theory as the solution to his concern about Schleiermacher's dualism by remarking that,

Since at least 1984, German-language *Skopos* theory has been proclaiming the target-side perspective, in effect allowing the criteria and views of professional translators to erupt within academic discourse. ... *Skopos* theory means that the classical dualism has been broken: whichever translation approach you choose, it depends on the purpose for which you are doing the translation, and not on the true eternal nature of translation.

Scholars, practitioners and readers

Schäffner (1999, pp. 6-7) remarks that Anthony Pym makes "a useful distinction" between an external and an internal view of translation – the external view is held by the clients or readers of translations, who assume that translation means sameness, while the internal view is held by scholars, who know that translating is far more complex. This argument doesn't really work, however, firstly because both the original work and the translation are generally produced for readers and not so much for scholars, and secondly because readers and scholars alike are aware that there are different kinds of translations for different purposes (hence the many different translations and versions of the Bible available commercially) and many scholars favour the view that translation should be as faithful to the original as possible even as many other scholars propose that the focus should be more on the translator and translator creativity.

Perhaps a more important question should be, Who decides what is faithful and whether meaning can be or has been transferred? Venuti (2008, p. 1) says that a translation, regardless of genre, "is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original'". This is not a universally accepted view among scholars today, but at least it should be allowed among theorists as a possible view, otherwise



there is a risk that the label of prescriptiveness applied to pre-1950s scholars may be applied equally on both sides of the debate, not to mention the risk of ignoring the perception and needs of the reader.

Norms and universals as factors in defining translation

Toury (1995, p. 1) remarked that “despite incessant attempts in recent decades to elevate it to a truly scientific status, as the empirical science it deserves to become Translation Studies is still in the making”. The culprit, as Toury (1995, p. 17) sees it, is an excessive focus on practical application that, he says, “has marked – and marred – scholarly work ever since the sixties”. He makes it very clear that he does not subscribe to the view of Peter Newmark and others that the main concern of translation theory is to determine translation methods, although he does concede that conclusions can be drawn from theory provided that these are left up to the practitioner.

In other words, theorising even in its norm-setting aspect need not be prescriptive nor do theorists have to be absolute in their conclusions. Chesterman (1999, p. 93) asks,

Why do norms exist? Partly in order to make life easier, of course, because they help us to predict how people are going to behave, and help us to decide how we ourselves are going to behave. In other words, they exist to promote the values that permit social behaviour, such as trust. They also exist in order to promote other values, other ideologies. Hermans links this idea to the fact that translations are always different from their originals, and that it is precisely in this difference that the underlying value, or ideology, can be seen.

But are translations always different from originals? Abundant evidence available would suggest that statements such as Chesterman’s “translations are always different from their originals” are too absolute. If an English-speaker says “Follow me” and a French speaker says “Suivez-moi”, not only is the meaning the same, but we can see the evidence of sameness in the effect this will have – the person being addressed, as long as he or she understands the



utterance, will have very similar if not the same number and types of responses to choose from. Admittedly, this is a simple example, but it does suggest that it's a matter of degrees of possibility rather than an absolute impossibility.

Regarding the search for translation universals, Toury (2004, p. 16) sounds a much more optimistic note. He admits that there is still a long way to go in the search for universals across languages. "Even though a deliberate search for regularities has long been recognized as an inherent feature of the endeavor of science, the quest for universals is anything but common practice among translation scholars." But he goes on to affirm that, despite a measure of disinterest in and even hostility towards the idea of searching for recurring patterns, there are shared features and these are no accident.

Chesterman (2004, p. 33) seems to be in agreement, saying that only by looking for similarities can a science progress to "the ability to make predictions concerning future or unstudied cases". But for this we need to start with the particular and then search for generalisations based on these. "Such a search does not deny the existence or importance of that which is unique in each particular case; nor does it deny the existence or importance of differences between cases."

Which cultural community gets to define translation?

Related to the question of how to define translation is the important issue of hegemony. Is the lack of agreement among scholars a feature of American and European linguistic traditions or is it universal across languages? Walker et al (1995, p. 5), despite their view that translations can involve "radical reformulation" if the initiator so requires and that there is "no limit on how far the translator can move away from the ST", nevertheless agree with Nord (1994, p. 64), who acknowledges that this skopos rule is "a very general rule which does not account for specific conventions prevalent in a particular culture community" and therefore adapts general skopos theory by adding to it the concepts of loyalty and convention, effectively limiting the variety of possible translation functions. One of the purposes of this study is to suggest that wider research is required into how other language communities approach



translation theory, define translation, deal with meaning transfer and assess translation quality.

A useful exercise would be to introduce translation students to as full as possible a spectrum of translation types, with examples, arranged according to their use, purpose, socio-political intent and so on instead of merely contrasting them in terms of acceptability and, as often happens, according to subjective views of faithfulness, correctness, readability and other criteria. For example:

- Word-for-word (a wooden rendition, with no regard for naturalness or meaning in the TL)
- Literal (a balance between word-for-word and sense-for-sense)
- Sense-for-sense (aimed at fluency in the TL so that it reads as though written in the TL)
- Re-translations and versions
- Paraphrase
- Summary
- Adaptation
- Re-creation



Chapter 4

University curricula covering translation theory and practice

The relevance and importance of translation theory for translation practice

Leal (2014, p. 37) points to two seemingly disparate views of the purpose of higher education, namely that it is either to teach professional competencies that will be exercised mostly outside the academic environment, or “to stimulate reflection and critical thinking within the given field”. At the outset, it may be fair to suggest that there could be a third option – that it is not necessarily a case of either one or the other but a balance of both.

Pym (1998, p. 20) has suggested that asking the right questions is the best way to finding solutions to a problem, and this may be applied not only to arriving at a scientific definition of translation but also to establishing criteria for assessing translation quality both in the classroom and in the professional world. In Chapter 2 we looked briefly at Savory’s (1968, p. 26) three questions for assessing a translation, and they are worth repeating here:

1. What does the author say?
2. What does he mean?
3. How does he say it?

How useful and how relevant is theoretical training to the translator? Kujamäki (2004, p. 188) suggests, on the basis of an experiment undertaken among translation students, that their suspicion of the usefulness of theoretical knowledge for actual practice “often comes from their experiences in the translation class, where, in the name of practice, ‘theories’ and ‘concepts’ are still too often kept out of every day business”. This conclusion is certainly valid, but the experiment does not go far enough, for at least three reasons.

Firstly, while there is a clear admission that “this line of thinking is common among professional translators as well” (2004, p. 188), no attempt is made to explain this and the study was not broadened to examine this perception among professionals who, after all,



should have the advantage of maturity and experience and therefore would be less like to follow “this line of thinking”.

Secondly, vagueness and misunderstandings about the issue of relevance of theoretical knowledge are to be expected among students.

Thirdly, the experiment focuses mainly on the students’ self-confidence (again, to be expected) and makes no attempt to show how theory can be useful to the professional.

A more useful study, in the form of a survey on the professionalization of translation and interpreting among professionals, is briefly summarized by Liu (2019, p. 301), citing Katan (2009, pp. 111-153). It revealed that while scholars consider theory to be essential, only 3% of professionals agreed. Theory ranked eighth in importance, behind practical components such as translation practice, strategies, electronic tools, subject-specific knowledge, contrastive grammar and contrastive linguistic. In fact, most participants considered formal academic training to be unimportant, or at least far less important than on-the-job training. Katan (2009, p. 124) concludes, “University training, it would seem, pales in comparison with the individual, life-long learning, training and specialization gained through on-the-job experience”.

One surprising fact that emerged from this survey was the low image (and self-image) of translators – Katan (2009, p. 130) points out that even the European Union, which is one of the world’s leading employers of professional translators and interpreters, groups these professionals together with secretaries, typists, transcriptionists and photocopiers.

Theory and practice in translation teaching

Hatim (2001, p. 163) has remarked that it was an important assumption in applied translation studies that “in the training of translators it is critical to include some theoretical input”. It is fair to conclude that, at present, the theoretical input accounts for more than just “some” and the ratio of theory to practice may be as large as 50:50. The question this present research seeks to address is whether this volume of theoretical training helps to improve and inform



practice. The results of the admittedly limited survey conducted for this purpose indicate that the majority of translators believe it does not and would prefer training to be far more practical.

Hatim (2001, p. 164) also addresses the question of whether translators should work from the foreign language into their mother tongue or vice versa, or even in both directions, pointing to two major assumptions, the general one being that translation should be into the mother tongue, with some teachers and employers assuming that competence should be fully bilingual. This is another issue that has changed since 2001 – it is now more generally assumed, in least in multilingual South Africa with its historic predominance of English/Afrikaans translation, that translators should ideally be able to translate in both directions.

Francis R. Jones (2006, p. 59), a poetry translator and academic, makes an acknowledgement that is important for purposes of this study when he says that the high cultural prestige of poetry and the difficulties of translating it “make poetry translating a highly valued skill” but adds that this area is still lacking in research.

Recognising that even non-literary translation is not always a simple task, Jones (2006, pp. 60-61) goes on to enumerate the far more complex problems facing the literary translator, which go beyond words and grammar and include challenges such as considering context, ensuring textual cohesion and, in the case of poetry, dealing with non-semantic aspects such as rhyme, rhythm, diction and meter. He then suggests a need for research “to explore further how think-aloud data about poetry translation can be gathered and analysed, and what contextual information would be needed in order to interpret the analyses” (2006, p. 61). Specifically, he proposes a research project that focuses not on the product – how well the target text “reflects the stylistic subtleties of the source” but rather focuses on the translator and on the translation process itself. What tasks did the translator have to perform? What problems were faced and how were they solved? (2006, p. 63)

Hatim (2001, p. 88) favours practitioner-oriented research that dispenses with “unhelpful distinctions such as theory as ‘an exercise in reflection’ versus practice as ‘what one normally



does””. Again, this study proposes that the answer may be a grey area rather than one that is black or white. Chesterman’s remark (2002, p. 2) that the purpose of theory is to give practitioners “a perspective from which to contemplate” comes to mind, and it seems to be an idea that has merit, but an idea that has at least as much merit, advanced by Hermans and Toury and in fact referenced by Chesterman himself (1999, p. 91) is that scholars should consider various options for translators to follow, but leave the translators to make their own choice.

Translation and context

Interpretation out of context is a problem in any communicative act, whether it is speech, reading or translation, and this needs to be made clear during translator training. Gutt (1998, p. 41) puts the spotlight on context as an inferential aspect of translation using the following example:

Example 1

- (a) Joe: ‘Will Sarah be long?’
- (b) Pam: ‘She is with Frank now’.

Gutt (1998, pp. 41-42) sees two possible interpretations of Pam’s indirect response. Either Sarah won’t be long because Frank never keeps people long, or she will be long because Frank is known for keeping people long. In fact, there may be at least one more interpretation. Joe could be looking for Sarah because Frank wants to see her, and Pam is saying Sarah is already with Frank.

We can’t know which of these interpretations is correct unless we know the context. Gutt’s (1998, p. 41) point is that “communication not only requires encoding, transfer and decoding processes, but crucially involves inference in addition”. This can have serious implications when gaps have to be bridged between cultures. Thus Fotheringham (2017, p. 81) provides an example from the French translation of Marlene van Niekerk’s 1994 novel *Triomf*⁶ that illustrates how a lack of knowledge of (and failure to research) the culture and history of South

⁶ The French was translated from the English version of the novel.



Africa led one translator to render the phrase “NG church” into French as *église non gouvernementale*, which translates back into English as “non-governmental church”. The translator mistook the “NG” as part of the abbreviation “NGO”, meaning “non-governmental organization”, when it actually stood for “Dutch Reformed”. This was not just a language error, but also masked part of South Africa’s apartheid history, where the Dutch Reformed Church was part of the apartheid engine that used to drive racial oppression.

Curriculum design in translator training

As far back as 2001, Hatim (2001, p. 174) pointed out that there was “a discernible pattern of a move away from a grammar-based towards a culture-based syllabus and, eventually, text-based course materials”. This is in line with the wider shift away from the linguistic focus, but it is worth asking whether the shift might be working against the idea of a syllabus that is more practical and whether it might be better (and less prescriptive) to teach all three approaches.

A grammar-based syllabus might explain the differences between proposed pairs of languages in terms of lexical and sentence patterns and suggest ways of dealing with problems such as the use (and often the very deliberate use, for example for emphasis or contrast) of articles in English and how to render these in languages such as Chinese and Korean, which have no articles at all. For literary translation it would be useful to explain how different languages give preference to different literary devices – less reliance on rhyme in Korean poetry, for example. Toury (1995, p. 167) remarks that an English limerick could very well become “a four-liner, a non-anapestic entity or a text devoid of a punch line, or even all three together” when translated into another language, and a Shakespearean sonnet may end up as a different kind of sonnet or a non-sonnet.

Teaching models

Once the issue of the translation brief has been resolved, the act of translation begins in earnest with reading. Chantal Wright (2016, p. 120) says that the type of text the translator will create can be influenced ideologically or by a creative impulse or both but, whatever the approach, he or she must be an accomplished reader. For many if not most professional



translators, producing a good translation means reading the entire source text, if possible, to ensure maximum understanding of the content. Nord (1991, p. 1) goes even further, suggesting a comprehensive analysis of the text that is applicable to all text types and can provide “a reliable foundation for each and every decision which the translator has to make in a particular translation process”. Another suggestion worth looking at is Wagner’s (2002, pp. 68-72) “distancing strategies”, a problem-solving tool that includes taking short breaks to listen to a translated segment (if dictated), letting a co-worker insert your corrections and thus cast a fresh pair of eyes on your work, doing something completely different in order to come back refreshed, consulting other translators or even handing the problem text over completely to another translator for a fresh perspective, consulting a terminologist, leaving the work overnight, and so on.

Accessibility of the translated text

Walker et al (1995, pp. 99-115) point out that the problem facing trainers of translation is “how to incorporate the shift towards accessibility into translation curricula”. The conventional notion has been and to some extent still is that the translator must seek to create a mirror-image equivalence between ST and TT. What the ST says, the TT must say in similar fashion, the idea being to approximate as far as possible the lexical items and even the grammatical structure.

The problem with this approach is that it assumes complete equivalence is possible, and that this complete equivalence, whichever way it is identified, it is the measure of accuracy. Walker et al (1995, p. 8) suggest that we need a framework that is not dependent on rigid definitions of faithfulness and that is “flexible enough to be used in any translation that may arise” and assert that translation-oriented text analysis proposed by Nord (see above) was found to be the solution.

Teaching of context in translator training

In the context of translator training, especially when dealing with different genres and translating between genres, Hatim (2001, p. 143) suggests that trainees should get more



practical, genre-based experience and be made aware of context. “The role of contextual specifications is often neglected in the training of translators, and the focus has invariably been on the ‘words on the page’, and not on the need to instil an awareness of larger discourses and genre specificities”.

Assessment of translation quality

More recently, Fotheringham (2021, p. 266) has suggested assessment procedures as one of the considerations to be included for selection, along with study material and pedagogical instruments, on the basis of criteria defined by the desired learning outcomes. It is not enough to assign a grade to a translation or to an aspect of the translation – the trainee needs clear, helpful feedback and must know what made the difference between a score of 50% and a score of 90%.

Gutt (2000, p. 8) links the issue of assessment of translations with the debate about whether translation equivalence is possible at all, saying that, “The need for decision-making arises from the fact that the target-language rarely allows the translator to preserve exactly what the original conveyed”, but the proof he advances seems questionable as it is based purely on Levý’s (1967) illustration of the difficulty of translating the word “Mensch” from the title of Bertoldt Brecht’s play “Der gute Mensch von Sezuan” into English. Admittedly, the German word “Mensch” (human being, either male or female) conveys something slightly different from the nearest English equivalent *person*, but Gutt seems to disregard the fact that “target-language” doesn’t mean only English, not by far. In Afrikaans, for example, “Mensch” is translated with no difficulty at all as “mens”. Gutt also fails to show what he means by “rarely” – is this based on a proven statistic involving every possible target language? Has he taken into account every possible language pair? Considering that there are well over 7 000 distinct languages in the world, and therefore over 50 000 language pairs for potential translation, it is abundantly clear that a translation difficulty involving one word selected from the title of one play from one author in one language pair can’t be sufficient evidence for the assertion.



There seems to be a twin assumption, on the part of some theorists, that equivalence, however it is defined, is necessary and that equivalence requires translation items to be the same semantically as well as in register and style and in every other way. Yet it is precisely these lofty criteria that, at least in the eyes of these theorists, make equivalence unattainable despite a wealth of evidence that translators historically have been able to render meaning accurately or at least adequately between languages that often differ quite radically in terms of grammatical structure, cultural expression, the semantic content of their vocabulary and so on. In English, for example, there is no difficulty in calling a sibling “older brother” or “older sister”, regardless of the age or gender of the person addressing the older sibling and sometimes even without a family relationship. In Korean, however, a younger female calls a slightly older male 오빠 (*oppa* or “older brother”) but calls a slightly older female 언니 (*eonni* or “older sister”), and a male will call a slightly older male 형 (*hyeong* or “older brother”) but a slightly older female 누나 (*nuna* or “older sister”). Something is lost in translation, but that something is not meaning, because the meaning can be adequately conveyed in various ways, including context, footnotes and subtitles.

It is also worth asking whether the quest for perfect equivalence across languages is perhaps assuming an accuracy (a scientific accuracy, furthermore) within human language that does not always exist. After all, in English and other languages we say the sun rises and sets even though this is not scientifically accurate. We ascribe emotions to the heart (in European languages) while in Biblical Hebrew, for example, emotions are ascribed to the kidneys and other organs besides the heart. It seems unreasonable to make allowances for such inaccuracies and yet set lofty criteria involving scientific accuracy for equivalence between languages.

That translation equivalence is possible much if not most of the time can be seen from the fact that translation has been carried on actively and with great effectiveness for thousands of years and has resulted in thousands of products, that multiple similar and even identical translation items have been produced independently by different translators, and that there



is a great deal of agreement between translation practitioners on equivalence of translation items.

Related to this is the fact that the assessment of “good” or “acceptable” translations is not only necessary but also need not be a choice between being prescriptive or being descriptive, and this is evident from several facts about the industry. First, terminologists (see data analysis in Chapter 6) spend their time seeking to find or create accurate translations for words and phrases and, in the case of technical subjects, even one-to-one equivalence as far as possible. Second, they work in teams and often collaborate and network in professional associations to accomplish this, and the result has been a plethora of general dictionaries and technical dictionaries in many different subject fields.⁷ Third, translations so recorded are generally considered to be suggestive rather than prescriptive, so that translators are free to choose between available options, or reject them all and come up with their own suggestions, which are often incorporated in reprints of dictionaries and glossaries.

Furthermore, it should not be assumed that assessing the quality or effectiveness of a translation is completely subjective. If a translator renders the phrase “Jane has passed away” as “Jane het heengegaan” or “Jane het gesterwe” or “Jane het die emmer geskop”, the difference as to meaning, style and register might be debated quite fruitfully, but if he renders it as “Jane het weggegaan” there is a definite case for a poor translation, objectively speaking, and if he renders it as “Jane het oorsee gegaan”, even more so. In fact, assessment often requires the assessor to be prescriptive.

Required competencies

Fotheringham (2021, pp. 266-267) references eight competencies that a literary translator should possess. Proposed by Petra-e, a network of institutions involved in the education and training of literary translators, these competencies are as follows:

⁷ Fotheringham (2021, p. 269) makes the point that there is a scarcity of specialised terminology in the African languages, with the result that translation trainees are taught to adapt texts, “sometimes radically”, but according to my respondents working in terminology institutions, including a large department in the SA National Department of Arts and Culture, the situation may not be as dire as it seems, and it is improving (see Chapter 6).



- Transfer competence (so he/she can recognise and solve translation problems appropriately).
- Language competence (mastery of both the SL and the TL).
- Textual competence (knowing how to apply literary styles and genres).
- Heuristic competence (knowing where to source and how to use secondary material aiding the translation process).
- Literary–cultural competence (knowing how to recognise and deal with cultural differences and knowledge of literary movements).
- Professional competence (industry knowledge and experience and mastery of literary translation ethics)
- Evaluative competence (ability to assess literary translations).
- Research competence (knowing how to conduct methodological research to improve translation practice).

In view of the obvious gap that exists in the teaching of literary translation methods and the availability of resources to aid in such translations, this study proposes that more resources need to be researched and produced to fill the gap and provide the translation trainee with a variety of criteria to apply to the task, such as Robert Bly's "eight stages" (Bly, 1983) in the translation of poetry. The stages that he suggests (and that can be built on) are:

1. Setting down the literal translation.
2. Getting a handle on the concepts and beliefs presented in the original poem; abandon the poem if the translator does not feel a connection with them.
3. Rewriting the literal translation to ensure the meanings of the poem are not lost.
4. Translating the latest draft into spoken English, using phrases that have been heard in natural conversation.
5. Examining the translation in terms of tone to ensure that it carries over from the original (whether happy, sad, etc.)
6. Listening to the original for sound and carry those same sounds over to the translation, such as the use of open vowel sounds.
7. Speaking with a native speaker to go over the translation to ensure meanings and tone are maintained.
8. Completing the translation with all of the advice given and paying close attention to the original poem's rhythm and rhymes (which are often less about end rhymes than internal rhymes).

The use of actual examples as a teaching tool



A very useful tool would be a compendium of actual poetry translations with brief analyses of both the product and the process to show translation practitioners and trainees what was involved and how problems were solved. As an illustration, consider an analysis submitted for a research assignment in 2021. This unpublished paper involved the present researcher's own translation into Afrikaans of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem, "Ozymandias", the difficulties encountered and the solutions that were settled upon. Here is the translation, together with the original poem:

Ontmoet ek 'n reis'ger uit 'n ou land.	A	I met a traveller from an old land.
Hy sê, "Twee bene, yslik sonder lyf	B	He said, "Two legs, enormous without trunk
Staan in die woestyn. En naby, in sand	A	Stand in the desert. And nearby, in sand
Halfbegraaf, gesig vergruis, fronsend, styf.	B	Half sunk, face crushed, frowning stiffly.
Die lip wat krul, die gryns wat koud beskik,	C	The curling lip, the sneer that disposes coldly,
Wys hoe goed sy beeldhouer drif kon lees.	D	Tell how well its sculptor read those passions.
Drif wat leef, gestempel op dooie goed,	E	Passions that life, stamped on dead things,
Die hand wat hul spot, en die hart wat voed:	E	The hand that fed them, and the heart that feeds:
Op die voetstuk, dié woorde, fyn gepleeg:	F	On the pedestal, these words, finely wrought:
'My naam is Osmandjas, Koning so sterk.	G	'My name is Ozymandias, a King so strong.
Kyk, O magtiges, wanhopig my werk!'	G	Look, O mighty ones, with despair upon my work!'
Niks bly meer oor nie. Rondom die verweer	H	Nothing remains. Around the decay
Van die kolossale wrak, grensloos, leeg,	F	Of the colossal wreck, boundless, bare,
Strek die sand soos 'n plaat, eensaam en ver."	H	Stretches the sand like a sheet, lonely and far."

Reproducing literary quality

The rhyme scheme was impossible to reproduce since languages work differently, but it doesn't have to be and the aesthetic enjoyment can be approximated or even enhanced depending on the effort and ability brought to bear by the translator. It also isn't as rich as the original, which goes only up to F where I went as far as H. I didn't want to force an exact reproduction for fear of making the language sound unnatural.

I tried to retain the meaning, and was able to do so most of the time. For the sake of rhyming and metre, however, I had to deviate from the literal meaning in a few instances but managed to do so without sacrificing the essence, e.g.

"legs of stone" was literally rendered as "legs" in the Afrikaans poem



“Half sunk became “half-buried” but probably might have been rendered as
“halfversonke”
“these lifeless things” became “dead things”
“these words appear” became “these words, finely wrought”
“king of kings” became “mighty king”

At times I chose to recreate rather than imitate. For example, the opening line is a little more dramatic than the original, starting with an active verb and saying, “Met I a traveller” instead of “I met a traveller”. This is because the straightforward sentence structure would have been too prosaic, so I deliberately chose a poetic form. But the meaning remains the same as it had to be true to history.

Shelley makes abundant use of enjambment – where the poet leaves a line unfinished so you have to read on to see the end, e.g. “from an antique land / Who said ...”. Almost every line in the poem therefore is like a cliffhanger. I managed to achieve several instances of enjambment, e.g. “in sand / halfbegräaf”; “Twee bene, yslik sonder lyf / staan in die woestyn”; “die gryns wat koud beskik, / wys hoe goed”, “die verweer van die kolossale wrak” and “leeg, / strek die sand”.

By choosing deliberately I was able to insert plenty of alliteration, e.g. “s” in yslik, sonder, staan, woestyn, sand, fronsend, styf, strek, sand, soos, eensaam. Also “g” in “reis’ger”, “begräaf”, “vergruis”, “gryns”, “gepleeg”. Also, on “r”, “d”, “t”. Assonance on “e”, “ee”, “oe”, “oo”, “a” and “aa”.

The last line has a simple simile “like a sheet, lonely and ...”, the shortest way I could find to express the idea of “lone and level”. In short, I attempted to be my own poet instead of being Shelley, and had to strike a balance between writing a new poem and still reflecting the meaning of the original work.

Errors in source and target texts

An issue that warrants attention from both theorists and teachers with regard to the training of translators is how to deal with errors in the source text that can affect the translation.



Writers are not immune to error. An issue that should be dealt with in the classroom is how to deal with grammatical, typographical, factual and other errors in the original. Does the translator translate the error and insert a footnote showing what the original and the correct translation should have been, or automatically correct the error in the translation and insert a footnote showing that the original read differently? Or would either approach be correct depending on the purpose of the translation, for example either to convey (corrected) information or to study the original?

A crucial issue is the problem of how to deal with translation errors and poor translation choices. Nabokov (1941, p. 160) perhaps humorously identifies three grades of “evil” a translator can commit. First is that of error due to ignorance, the second is that of intentionally skipping words or passages the translator cannot be bothered with or that he thinks the reader might not understand, and the third is that of conforming to the target language and audience to such a degree that the work is completely recreated. This last category can of course be related to the debate about the visibility or invisibility of the translated, which has been dealt with above.

One could include in this third category or even as a separate fourth category the practice of unethical translation, where the translator either through ignorance or by design omits or mistranslates something in the original for ideological, commercial or other non-artistic purposes. Thus, Venuti (1998, p. 2) Venuti cites the example of an English translation of an article that had been written in Spanish and was intended to promote intercultural understanding. Despite its purpose of presenting a history of Mexican peoples, the English translation was slanted against pre-Columbian Mexicans, “whose oral culture is represented as inferior”.

Resources for practitioners

A related issue, and perhaps a potential remedy especially for translators of existing authors (or authors whose work is no longer under copyright but might still be in demand), is the provision of editorial resources such as writing style guides, dictionaries and guides for literary



and technical translation. Translators could be encouraged to keep a journal of useful translation solutions to be shared with fellow-translators in translation associations and other forums, and also with theorists and academics in exchanges such as that between Chesterman and Wagner.

The creation of a charter for translators

Apart from a few professional associations such as the South African Translators' Institute, South Africa does not have any strong organisations⁸ to protect the interests of translators, interpreters, editors and other language workers or their clients, and also to provide oversight with regard to ethical considerations in translation practice, the publication of translations and the development of languages. Teaching institutions need to research this gap and the need for a professional charter similar to charters that provide oversight for accountants, auditors and so on so that recommendations can be made to appropriate government and other bodies.

Market needs

An issue that must not be lost sight of is that of the need of a particular market for translation. Thus, Sayaaheen (2019, p. 186) says that “translation is not merely a matter of transferring a source text into another language but that translation is also a business and an industry” and that, to meet those needs of a specific market, the translator has to acquire and manage “many competencies, skills and factors” and curricula must be able to prepare students to work in the market. Competencies that curricula should cover include language skills, translation and interpreting skills, translation ethics, cultural issues, working with machine translation and how to use and keep up with translation and interpreting technologies and resources available in the market.

⁸ The South African Language Practitioners Council Act was promulgated in 2014, but as at the date of this writing (July 2023), the SA Language Practitioners Council has not yet started operating.



Machine translation

Melby and Hague (2019, p. 206) point out that we are living in the age of machine translation and that some believe it will eventually replace human translation. Wagner (2002, p. 116) disagrees, saying that, while machine translation is useful, human translation “does seem to have a future” and that there is no evidence for increased productivity through the use of machine translation (of course, this was said in 2002, so the situation may be very different today). Hutchins and Somers (1992, p. 2) said that the main obstacles to machine translation are “not computational but linguistic”, and what is on this list of obstacles is significant in view of the debate that is the focus of the present study: lexical ambiguity, syntactic complexity, vocabulary differences between the languages, elliptical and ungrammatical constructions, and “extracting the ‘meaning’ of sentences and texts from analysis of written signs and producing sentences and texts in another set of linguistic symbols with an equivalent meaning”. Is the “problem” of translation somehow simpler for machine translation than it is for human translation, or could it be that we are overlooking valuable insights, gained over thousands of years, from which to synthesise at least a general theory of translation?

University curricula would do well to encourage and conduct research into how machine translation could be used – perhaps just to produce raw translation for later editing or for information purpose only. Students would also benefit from courses teaching them about the effectiveness of machine translation compared to human translation, and how best to use available machine translation technology and software. Interestingly, several participants in the survey used for this study indicated that there is a need for wider use of translation technology in the field, and felt it should feature more strongly in the academic training programmes.

Testing the effectiveness of translator training

Wagner (2002, p. 36) makes a suggestion worth exploring, namely that part of the academic discipline of translation studies should be devoted to research into the effectiveness of translator training and that topics could include:



- How to pre-select and examine candidates for employment;
- Surveys of past students to establish how many of them succeed as translation professionals; and
- Contacting successful graduates and their employers for feedback and input to improve training courses.

Since much of this would involve the employer more than academia, it may require the academic institutions to engage employers for financial and research support where feasible, in order to accomplish these research goals.



Chapter 5

The role of assessment and the prescriptive and descriptive approaches

Norms vs. prescriptivism

Norms are generally defined as standards of achievement or behaviour that is required, desired or described as normal or correct within by some social grouping. Christina Schäffner (1999, pp. 1-2) points out that in the history of translation, such notions as accuracy, correctness, or well-formedness have played an important role in assessing the quality of a translation” and that the debate about norms has shifted from linguistic norms to translational norms.

Chesterman (2004, p. 36) makes an important point when he says that one contribution of prescriptivism has been its concern with translation quality. “Defining quality, and devising reliable measures of it, are genuine research problems that should form part of research into translation effects.”

Among the problems Chesterman (2004, pp. 35-36) identifies with regard to prescriptivism are overgeneralization (to the neglect of the idea that there are different kinds of translations), the fallacy of generalizing from a non-typical particular (for example applying Bible translation principles to all other kinds of texts), and idealization (for example the idea that a perfect translation would be perfectly equivalent and perfectly natural).

He acknowledges (2004, p. 36) at least three positive contributions of the prescriptivist approach: that they produced the first attempts at generalization, that they attempted to produce typologies, and that they showed concern for quality. With the pejorative approach, Chesterman (2004, p. 37) says, all translations, or all translations of a certain kind, are considered deficient in some way – too free, too fluent, too natural, too unnatural, not faithful or not beautiful, and never both faithful and beautiful. Problems identified are: a too-narrow view of what constitutes a good translation, an assumption that universals are absolute when



they might be so only within a certain culture, and the socio-cultural effect, which results in a negative public perception of the translator's role and a negative perception among translators of themselves (2004, p. 38), while positive contributions include a concern over quality and an awareness of ethical issues (2004, pp. 38-39). The descriptive approach is more recent and involves corpus-based work on translation universals. Problems identified by Chesterman include the rigour and reliability of testing, a lack of representativeness of samples, a lack of true universality and a failure to show the causes of linguistic features thought to be universal (2004, pp. 42-44).

A more positive view of norms and standards

Wagner (2002, pp. 4-5) is of the view that the prescriptive approach is not a bad thing and that many translators would welcome concrete advice and guidance, and "even doctrines", from theorists, who in this view should be champions of translators, helping to define terminology used in the debate, providing guidance about how to recruit translators, how to assess a translation, "how to specify the purpose of a translation, how to measure and thus ensure reader satisfaction" and so on.

In view of the differences between literary and technical translation, which are generally recognised, it can be expected that there will be a difference in whether and to what extent either the descriptive or the prescriptive approach will be applied. Technical translation, for example, involves terminological development and generally seeks consistency and one-to-one equivalency, while literary works usually involve self-expression and subjective, aesthetic effect and is therefore not subject to the rules and norms applied to technical writing and technical translation.

Chesterman (1999, p. 91) makes very pertinent remarks about the importance of norms and the issue of translator choice by saying that we deprive translators of their freedom to choose if we see them as being subject to rules and norms, and that "norm-thinking makes translation into a mechanistic, predetermined activity", an inference that both Toury and Hermans reject. He adds that, according to Toury, norm-breaking does carry the risk of sanctions, but still the



translator can always choose to act independently and accept the responsibility for the consequences. Then Chesterman concludes:

You are free to break the norms, if you can get away with it – and maybe make new norms. Hermans highlights the fruitfulness (for scholars) of looking at alternatives which were available but which the translator chose not to take. Translators always have a choice.

Jean Boase-Beier (2006, p. 47) likewise rejects the idea that norms are necessarily prescriptive and argues that constraints on translators can actually be empowering because “it is in the interplay between given extra- and intratextual constraint and individual freedom that creativity develops” and that “the constraints imposed by the presence of a source text empower and enhance the creativity of the translation act by placing the translator in a position of striving to overcome them”. However, this must be read against two basic assumptions she makes about the nature of theory – first, that a theory is an explanation of practice. Once it dictates practice it loses its explanatory power. Second (2006, p. 48), theories are creative in themselves in that they require the interpreter to consider a set of circumstances, reinterpret them and either accept or reject the new scenario.

In this regard, Hickey (1998, p. 2) suggests that the discipline of Translation Studies tries to make a clear distinction between the descriptive approach and the prescriptive approach:

Translation Studies concentrates on describing and analysing the procedure or processes, rather than commenting on the product itself and asking how well or badly any particular translation has been done. This non-prescriptive approach, among others, is interested in how translation is actually done, examining the methods that have been used throughout history and asking how texts fit into the receiving cultures.

This distinction is really an echo of an earlier exhortation by Snell-Hornby, Lefevere and Bassnett (1990, p. 4) “to move from ‘text’ as a putative ‘translation unit’, to culture”.



Norms and assessment

Regarding assessment, it is fair to ask who sets the standards and who does the quality assessment, not only in the workplace but also in the research field and even in the classroom. Chesterman and Wagner (2002, pp. 80-81) make the valid point that translators (also) assess the quality of their own work. A translation may be judged to be correct, incorrect or just a matter of personal preference, with a spectrum of variations between all three of these.

Teaching creativity

Finally, between the theorists, the teaching institutions and the translation profession, a model needs to be designed for both teaching and assessing creativity, particularly in literary translation but even in technical translation. Standards must be clearly communicated to trainees and applied to their practical work.

It is not uncommon for translators to complain that they do not receive enough feedback or not clear enough feedback from their trainers, or that they mostly hear feedback such as “too literal though not incorrect” or “that does not sound right” or “that’s not what the original says”. Too often, no attempt is made to explain how the work could be improved. Kirsten Malmkjær (2020, p. 24) disagrees with the Kantian view that creativity cannot be taught, saying that it “does not find favour among contemporary writers on creativity”. For this she cites Nanay (2014, p. 33), who argued that one has to know the ideas and objects of the field to ensure one’s own originality; Leadbeater (2008, p. 112), who argued that creativity comes from exposure to different points of view and experience, for example in an educational context; and Gaut (2010, p. 268), who made a strong argument that Kant was failing to distinguish between how we learn and what we learn, and that learning is at least in part about copying and imitation.

It is hard to see how all these skills, strategies and theories can be taught, and taught coherently, when there is so much disagreement among scholars about defining them and establishing how they operate.



Chapter 6

Presentation and analysis of survey results

Introduction

The methodology used for collecting data in this survey was to solicit feedback through questionnaires emailed to translators and terminologists working at private and government institutions in South Africa. The researcher's main purpose was to gain insight into how these language practitioners view translation theory and whether they find it useful in their professional work.

A total of 200 participants were invited, either directly or through their employers, to volunteer information. About 30 responses were received, and no participant was required to disclose their identities on the questionnaire. Every effort was made to ensure ethical handling of participant engagements, their contributions and their personal data, which was stored safely on a password-protected computer and never disclosed in this study or to Wits University.

Some learnings from the data surveys

The survey questionnaires were never tested, with the result that there were two questions the respondents misunderstood, and three respondents required follow-up emails for clarification. Some of the questions were also too open-ended and required follow-up clarifications, but by and large the questionnaires served their purpose and provided the necessary insights.

Most of the respondents are quite experienced – only three had less than 10 years of experience. Nine had between 10 and 19 years and eight had between 20 and 29 years of experience, and six had between 30 and 50 years. Most had translation qualifications (20 altogether), while two had qualifications in language-related fields but not in translation, three had done informal studies or short courses only, and one had no qualifications at all.



All the respondents believe that formal training is important, but the two who have no formal translator training have a great deal of experience and enjoy successful careers, while one was only able to get informal training; one said the real training is on-the-job, and one said the only real value of formal training was in lending credibility to the translator.

When asked how much value they place in theoretical training, only 13 (50%) of the respondents said it was useful for learning translation skills. Four respondents said theory should be foundational only and placed more value on practical training, four felt it had little or no value, two said theory is good for professional reflection but had little practical value, and one had no translator training at all but is nevertheless a successful translator. One respondent gave up on formal translation studies because the programme was “overloaded” with theory. Interestingly, one person said they actively referred back to theory for translation problem-solving, but the survey did not allow for further probing and would be worth revising for a later study.

The vast majority of respondents (19) affirmed some relevance of theory for the practising professional, while only seven felt it was irrelevant, and 20 (76.9%) felt that a knowledge of translation theory can make one a better translator, but none of the respondents chose to explain why. When asked if they thought studying the history of translation theory was essential, only 7 said “Yes”, while 15 said “No” and four were either uncertain or seemed not to understand the question, with several confusing theory and history of theory.

It was evident that most of the respondents consider theory to be interesting and relevant, but further investigation might help to establish exactly how and to what extent this is the case, and whether the amount of theoretical study included in the various curricula justifies the amount of usefulness for translation practice. Almost all the respondents felt that there was too much theory and too little practice included in their courses of study. Finally, in the suggestions section, many indicated that machine translation should feature more strongly in training programmes and that the use of MT software should be encouraged to a far greater degree both in the classroom and in the workplace.



Summary, conclusions and recommendations

The purpose of this project was to examine the impact of translation theory on translation practitioners, to look at perceptions of university curricula, and to provide an overview of the theory itself. Based on the literature reviewed and the survey that was conducted, it is evident that too many practitioners feel the theory is largely or even completely irrelevant to their work, and that most if not all believe theory could be more useful and relevant. It is fair to ask whether enough is being done to show practitioners, both in the field and in the classroom, that the value of theory is, for example, in giving them conceptual tools with which to reflect on their work and solve translation problems.

Some scholars and many practitioners feel that such input from scholars would not necessarily be seen as prescriptive and it is evident that theorists often incorrectly assume that being asked to guide and advise is the same as being prescriptive. Practitioners want to see scholars as helping them fight real workplace battles solving translation problems.

The literature reviewed demonstrated that there has been and still is a large amount of disagreement on crucial issues such as how to define translation, whether or not meaning can be transferred in translation or can even be pinned down at all, and how far a translation can “stray” from the source text and still be called a translation. For example, meaning clearly matters when one needs to follow instructions for making a bomb or mixing safe ingredients for baking. There is also a sense that, in efforts to move away from what is perceived as historical prescriptivism, thinkers who class themselves as descriptivist run the risk of being prescriptive themselves. Notable thinkers such as Chesterman, Hermans and Toury are among the few voices calling for more balance in the debate, and for more freedom of choice for the practitioner. The focus on culture has a great deal of merit, but there is at least one risk to be avoided, that of perpetrating cultural subversion (of the ST) in the name of cultural transfer and sensitivity to the SL culture. To insist that absolute equivalence is impossible is just as



wrong as insisting that equivalence is always possible (although, to be fair, few if any theorists ever said that equivalence is always possible).

It was also evident that, at least for the examples being used, what is being widely held up as a huge issue of untranslatability might turn out to be little more than the problem every translator has faced and still faces and resolves with greater or less success, depending on their skill – that of translating in context, linguistically, semantically and culturally. Very often the theory is based on a few selected examples when the net should have been cast far wider to account for more examples, different genres and different cultures.

A very important issue is formulating clearer criteria for assessment – students want to know more than just “this translation is worth this or that percentage” or “too literal” or “technically inadequate”.

Recommendations

1. During training, more emphasis should be placed on the use of machine translation software, technology and resources such as translation guides and compendiums of actual solved translation problems in our curricula and in practice.
2. Learnings from new trends in writing, such as plain language reviewing, should be incorporated in curricula.
3. Academia and theorists should do more to place translation practice on a more professional footing through research, discussion and practical recommendations, and thus help translators become more visible, at least with regard to their status.
4. As indicated by several respondents, translator training institutions should do more to gear their curricula to market and student needs, for example by ensuring good balance between the theoretical and practical components of their teaching material – some want to teach and would benefit from more theory, but some want to translate and would benefit from more practice.
5. There is scope for teaching creativity in translation, and particularly in literary translation, and shifting the focus slightly from technical and business translation.



6. As suggested by Wagner (see under “Testing the effectiveness of translator training” in Chapter 4 above), it would be useful to track translation graduates’ careers and thus gauge the effectiveness of training and the state of the market, which would also contribute towards putting translation on a more scientific footing.
7. More debate should be encouraged between theorists, academia and professionals on this issue, along the lines of the very insightful discussion between Chesterman and Wagner (2002).



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Annex 1

Translation survey questionnaire

The value of translation theory for translation practice

Note: All information provided by you will be treated as confidential, with full anonymity, and used solely for purposes of this research. By completing this questionnaire, you are giving consent for this information to be used for this purpose.

Name: _____

Institution where you studied: _____

Gender (please tick): M [] F []

Percentage literary vs. business translation: LT [__%] BT [__%]

Note: Shaded information is for statistical purposes. Names may be withheld from the researcher and will **not** be disclosed in the study.

1. Please state the amount of your translation experience in years and months: _____
2. What are your language combinations, from most frequent to least frequent? _____

3. Do you have a formal translation qualification? Please specify: _____
4. What value do you see in completing formal training? _____

5. What value/relevance do you see in translation theory as taught by the institution you studied at?

6. How is/was the curriculum at your institution of training made up? Tick where applicable:
 - Literary Theory and Technical Practical Translation []
 - A mix of literary and practical translation theory and a mix of literary and technical translation practice []
 - Literary Theory and Literary Translation Practice []
 - Technical Translation Theory and Technical Translation Practice []
7. Were you satisfied with the relevance of the curriculum offered by your institution? [Y] [N]
8. Can you give a reason/s for your response to Question 7? _____

9. Do you think translation theory should make you a better translator? Explain briefly. ____

10. Do you think translation theory is supposed to give you an understanding of the history of translation and translation practice, without necessarily making you a better translator?

11. Is there anything else you would suggest, e.g. in terms of research and teaching, to make translation theory more relevant and more useful to translation practice?



Annex 2

Terminology survey questionnaire

The value of translation theory for terminological practice

Note: All information provided by you will be treated as confidential, with full anonymity, and used solely for purposes of this research. By completing this questionnaire, you are giving consent for this information to be used for this purpose.

Name: _____ Institution where you studied: _____
Gender (please tick): M ☐ F ☐ Email address: _____
Note: Shaded information is for statistical purposes. Names may be withheld from the researcher and will **not** be disclosed in the study.

1. Please state your experience as a terminologist in years and months: _____
2. What are your language combinations? _____

3. Briefly, how would you describe your work? _____

4. What are your thoughts about this statement by relevance translation theorist Ernst-August Gutt: "[T]he target-language rarely allows the translator to preserve exactly what the original conveyed." _____

5. Do you believe one-to-one equivalence (in your language combinations) is possible, and to what extent? Please explain. _____

6. Do you consider the purpose of terminology development to be PRESCRIPTIVE, DESCRIPTIVE, SUGGESTIVE or A COMBINATION and why? _____

7. In your work, do you subscribe to any particular theory/ies of translation? Would you say you consciously or subconsciously apply such theory/ies? Please explain. _____

Annex 3

Tabulation of survey results

Survey 1 (Translators): Overview of individual responses

	Experience in years	Language pairs	Qualification	Training value	Value of theory	Composition of curriculum	Satisfied with relevance?	Reason for No. 7 response	Theory makes better translators?	History of theory essential?	Further suggestions
1	5	Sp/Eng	Y	Practical	Foundation	1,2,3 100% business	Y	No practical skills	Y, but not essential	Y	No
2	30	Eng/Afr	In unrelated field	< Aptitude	No training	No training 2% literary 98% business	N/A	N/A	Don't know – no training	Y. I'm sure it improves skill	Practical important; more real examples
3	47	Eng/Afr	Y	Essential	Reflection & inspiration	2 5% literary 95% business	Y	Improves application	Y, like engineers	N, if not enough practical	Not practical or specific enough
4	6	Xi/Eng	Y	Essential; vastly improved skill	Learned useful skills	2 60% literary 40% business	Y	Covered areas of importance	Y	Y	N
5	14.5	Eng/Afr	Y	Basics only	Foundation	2 100% business	N	Somewhat irrelevant, e.g. intercultural studies	N. Provides a foundation only.	Y	Should be more current, e.g. MT, translation software and plain language
6	13	Ger/Eng	Y	Important	Unimportant	4 100% business	Y	Practical – also check with colleagues	N – not practical enough	N – theory should be minimal	N
7	36	Pt/Eng/Sp/Fr	Y	Important, but knowledge, practise and research need to master skills	None, gave up on formal study because of theory overload.	3 10% literary 90% business	N	Too much theory, too little practice	N, but a distinction between literal and creative translation techniques important	No, history irrelevant	Main focus should be mastery of your languages.
8	34	Eng/Pt/Fr/Sp	Y	Important	Important for helping to understand	1,2,3,4 100% technical, no literary	Y	Relevant for practice	Y, it helps me to understand approaches	History not necessarily relevant; Intellectual	Focus more on traditional translation approaches and qualitative research
9	21.5	Eng/Sepedi	Y	Helps keep me current	Helps me solve translation problems	2 40% literary 60% business	Y	Exposure to different theories and texts	N. Foundation	No, practice more important	N
10	10.5	Eng/Swahili	Y MA	Useful for practice; gives credibility	Not too relevant; even confusing.	2 10% literary 90% business	N	Too academic; not market-oriented	Y. Must lay foundation; provide language skills	No. Focus should be on improving practical skill	Should teach business skills for freelancers
11	17	Eng/Ndebele	Not in translation	I learnt a lot	I learnt different translation strategies	1 and 3 70% literary 30% business	Y	The learning was relevant to my work.	Y. You learn the right strategy for the text.	Y. You can learn from former and new strategies.	More focus needed on translation strategies.
12	34	Eng/Tswana	None	Important – I attend workshops and inhouse training when invited	Practical training more useful	2 (informal)	Yes (informal)	The training is applicable.	Y. It provides practical skills.	N. Practical skills training more important.	More focus needed on language skills.
13	22	Eng/Tswana	No. Informal only.	It's about learning to translate so the reader feels as if the ST was written in the TL.	Theory can make you a good translator.	2 (informal) 100% business	Y, but informal only.	My organisation publishes in more than 1000 languages, so the course is robust.	N, on-the-job training more important.	Confused theory with history of theory and thus thought it was paramount.	More focus on practical training.
14	17	Eng/Sepedi	N. Short courses only.	One can learn translation strategies.	It is empowering; teaches techniques.	4 10% literary 90% business	Y	It covered different theories and provided practical training.	Y. One learns processes and techniques.	Y, but it should also make one a better translator.	N
15	30+ (20 years freelance)	Eng/Pt/Sp/Fr	Y – PhD in Literary Translation	Absolutely fundamental	Helps one to understand the fundamentals	2 80% literary 20% business	Y	Good support from the professors	Y. Important to understand the field.	N. Not absolutely, but it is important.	It is good to stay up to date with trends in the field.
16	25	Eng/Ndebele	Y. MA	Gaining knowledge	Gaining knowledge	2 30% literary 70% business	Y	Missed N/A	Y. It provides a foundation of principles.	Y, but we still need practical skills.	Teach culture, the causes of mistranslation, and translation principles.

	Experience in years	Language pairs	Qualification	Training value	Value of theory	Composition of curriculum	Satisfied with relevance?	Reason for No. 7 response	Theory makes better translators?	History of theory essential?	Further suggestions
17	19	Eng/Tsonga	Y. BA Hons in Translation	Gives one credibility.	Awareness creation	2 80% literary 20% business	Y	It offered a good mix of lit and tech theory and practice.	Y. It provides strategies for translation.	N. It should provide practical skills.	Translation theory should provide skills for technical translation.
18	12.5	Afr/Eng/Ger	Y. MA in Translation Studies	Without it, the translator will not see the nuances involved, such as culture and register.	Insights into culture-specific terminology; good to have a theoretical explanation for translation choices.	1,2,3,4 5% literary 95% business	Y	NWU provides technical training, including training in translation software.	Y. Culture-specific terminology and theory as a back-up.	N. History aspect missed. Good understanding of language required.	N
19	20	Fr/Eng/Afr	Y. Postgrad Diploma in Trans & Interpreting	Valuable techniques; balance between fluency and faithfulness; how to deal with untranslatable text; research techniques.	Not much value in theory; does not address the latest, e.g. localisation, client needs; cultural concerns.	2 10% literary 90% business	Y	Focus on general fields. But more emphasis needed on CAT and on specialisation.	Y. But it is not adapting to market and translation trends.	History aspect was missed.	More emphasis needed on technology and machine learning.
20	24	Fr/Eng/Pt	Sworn translator	Language understanding and practical training.	Theory aids correctness.	1,2,3,4 30% literary 70% business	N	Wide range of experience, from grammar to technical translation in different subject fields.	Y, because of grounding in language, but practical experience always very important.	N. Theory is more important and linguistic knowledge is essential.	More focus on language immersion to ensure ease of understanding and greater accuracy.
21	24	Zulu/Eng	Y. BA Hons	Broadens knowledge, provides strategies and solutions; enables me to explain my choices better.	I still refer back to theory to solve translation problems.	2 Percentage distribution missed: ???	Y	Good practical experience with interpreting in court.	Y, because it teaches technical terminology and helps identify gaps in terminology across languages.	No. It is supposed to make one a better linguist.	More practicals, more exposure to different subject fields in the govt sector and the private sector.
22	22	Eng/Venda	Y. MA PhD in progress	Important for correctness and skills learning	Enables learning about different approaches that are still relevant, e.g. equivalence and descriptive studies.	1,3,4 70% literary 30% business	Y	I still apply what I've learned 22 years ago.	Y. Theories help me apply my knowledge and skills.	N	Research needs to be emphasised.
23	22	Zulu/Eng/Xho/Ndebele/Pedi	Y. Postgrad qualification in Translation	Of value in the corporate environment and in business	It helps me to understand the translation process.	2,4 30% literary 70% business	Y	It covered all the important aspects of translation.	Y. Theory is more intellectual but it does aid understanding.	History aspect was missed. Theory helps me understand processes and strategies.	We need more case studies and examples and more practice.
24	4	Eng/Sepedi	Y. BA in Translation	Y. It prepares one for translation challenges.	Not much value. No attempt to teach technical translation.	3 Percentage distribution missed.	N	Theoretical grounding limited; no exposure to translation as a career path.	Y. It teaches strategy and language rules.	Not necessary; better to focus on the latest developments	Teach a broader view of the field and of theory; better balance of theory and practice; exposure to internships for real-life exposure.
25	10	Eng/Afr	Y. BA Hons in Language Practice	It teaches best practice; goes beyond linguistic knowledge.	It teaches translation in context and translation strategies.	2 50% literary 50% business	Y	It prepared me for the world of work, including the use of CAT tools.	Y. It helps me understand context, solve complex translation problems.	Y. History can make one a better translator.	More institutions should include internships in their curricula.
26	15	Eng/Chinese	Y. CATTI 2 and NAETI 3	It teaches skills needed for completing translation tasks.	It provides guidance for the practice of translation.	2 10% literary 90% business	N	It was behind the times; not practical enough; too much literary translation coursework.	Y. It provides problem-solving tools	No	Teachers should themselves be good translators.



Survey 2 (Terminologists): Overview of individual responses

	Experience in years	Language combinations	Job description	Thoughts on Gutt's remark about equivalence	Is one-to-one equivalence possible?	Purpose of terminology development	Do you apply a particular theory? Consciously or subconsciously?
1	15	Siswati/English	Harvest terms from actual material, define, supply equivalents	Generally not true. We sometimes struggle due to lack of language development. Some terms must be used in different contexts, e.g. <i>umsebenzi</i> for "service", "task" and "work".	Yes, but synonyms are often rendered by the same word due to lack of terminological development in Siswati. The goal is one-to-one equivalence.	Can be prescriptive, descriptive or suggestive, depending on the situation.	Yes. Subconsciously – I rarely consult theory books.
2	27	Xitsonga/English	Engaging with linguists and subject specialists, collecting and processing terminology.	Not always true. The terminologist can convey the original depending on knowledge and experience in the subject field.	Yes, as long as we are careful not to lose the meaning.	It may be a combination because language is not static but dynamic. We can learn from other languages to coin terms in ours.	Yes, but we do it subconsciously after we have learned from the theories.