



## Research in Contemporary Translation Studies

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**Abstract:** Translation Studies (hereafter abbreviated as TS) is now a fairly well established academic discipline related to the study of the translation theory and practice. Since its formal beginnings in the 1970's, it has witnessed an unprecedented growth and “has moved from the study of words to text to sociocultural context to the working practices of the translators themselves” (Munday 2016: 27). A notable characteristic of recent TS research has been its interdisciplinarity as it has had links to linguistics (especially semantics; pragmatics; applied, contrastive and cognitive linguistics), modern language studies, comparative literature, cultural studies (including gender and postcolonial studies), philosophy (of language and meaning, hermeneutics, deconstruction and ethics) and in recent years also to creative writing and sociology.

**Keywords:** contemporary Translation Studies, turns, trends, directions.

Borrowing a myriad of theoretical and methodological lenses from other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, the interdisciplinarity of TS is more evident now than ever before. Tracing its vibrant history, TS has come a long way from being a mere sub-discipline of contrastive linguistics, comparative literature or part of language-learning methodology via a discipline up to a multidiscipline.

From both a diachronic as well as synchronic point of view, TS has been characterized by “a complex criterion of a dominant theoretical concept” (Benčo qtd. in Angelovičová 2016:15). As a consequence of interdisciplinary contact with other disciplines, which may call into question the dominant theoretical concept, the so-called turns or ‘shifting viewpoints’ (see Snell-Hornby 2006) have emerged. The turns have reified the discussions of paradigms that have shaped TS. In its history, TS has witnessed a variety of such turns, from the ‘pragmatic turn’ in the 1960's linguistics – when many still viewed TS as a sub-field of contrastive linguistics – and the ‘cultural turn’ in the 1990's, to the ‘sociological turn’, ‘power turn’ or ‘cognitive turn’ over the past two decades. More recently, the 2010's saw the rise of the ‘technological’, ‘activist’ and ‘economic turns’, as proposed by Cronin (2010), Wolf (2014) and Gambier (2014), respectively. Of course, – nowadays, the given viewpoints can rarely be sharply demarcated from one another as a growing body of present-day TS research cannot be performed only within one approach. The turns in TS2 also imply approaches to translation and they are not discrete, hermetically sealed. In the same way as linguistic-translational analysis which does not consider the broader contextual factors is in some way deficient, so too are culturally oriented studies which abstain from a textual analysis.

TS in the second half of the 2010's, with all its manifold sub-branches and avenues of research, has taken on such incredible dimensions that it is possible to start to regard the discipline as a meta-hybrid. I use the concept of ‘meta-hybrid’ purposely here because when looking up the term ‘hybrid’ in e.g. *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the product of mixing two or more different things”, one could easily be misled to relegate present-day TS to a mere (interdisciplinary) connection of any two or more items. However, seen from a contemporary perspective, with so many offshoots and outgrowths, this would no longer truly correspond to its contents as the TS sub-disciplines are

getting cloned, mutually mutated and exponentially absorb the influences from various more or less related disciplines until a new one crops up.

These changes in the status of TS demand that a conventional understanding of what constitutes translation nowadays should be re-examined. Paradoxically, it was precisely the self-containment and a widening scope of the discipline which obscured a clear focus on translation. The more TS is coming to its own, the more its central object – translation – gets eroded and dispersed. The harder we look at translation, the softer our analytical focus appears to be getting and the more the specificity of our object seems to be dissolving. TS had to be invented, apparently, to show how blurred and how elusive a concept translation really is.

Even if Delabastista emphasizes the unsettling aspect of the TS's journey, the moving of its boundaries may offer new openings for TS, as this paper attempts to demonstrate.

Shedding light on various strands of contemporary TS research, the paper aims to re-conceptualize present-day TS focusing on the latest avenues of research which will continue to dominate TS discussions in the next decade or so. In the light of steering TS research in a relevant direction, they merit our scholarly attention. My goal is not to present an exhaustive overview of all recent TS research strands. Quite selectively, what I would like to focus on here are the most vital directions and trends for TS as a discipline, as resulting from a conceptual analysis of several dozen secondary sources. The study represents a fresh contribution to conceptual positioning of TS suggesting gaps in the research areas which merit translation scholars' attention in the future direction of TS. In terms of methodology, the study is conducted from an inductive positioning and is an outcome of conceptual research whose aspirations are to clarify current concepts, relate them into larger systems and introduce new frameworks which enable a better understanding of the current object of TS research.

The first sparks of interest in sociological aspects of TS can be traced back to Holmes' 1972 seminal study *The Name and Nature of Translation* where he touches on them in a section devoted to research into function-oriented descriptive TS. He claims that research focused on describing the functioning of translations in a receiver socio-cultural situation could lead to an interdisciplinary research field, later known as sociological TS<sup>3</sup> (Angelovičová 2016:16). Later on, Chesterman (2007) distinguishes three sub-fields of the sociology of translation: sociology of translations, sociology of translators and sociology of translating. Whereas the sociology of translations deals with *meta-texts* and their functioning in a receiving culture, the sociology of translators examines their position in society, their working conditions, copyrights and schedule of charges. In the centre of attention of the sociology of translating are stages of the translation process in a wider sense, *i.e.* quality check and editing, team translation, relationships with clients and other translation process participants. Moreover, Zabalbeascoa (2000) makes a distinction between translation processes in a wider and a narrower sense whereas the former is oriented towards an analysis of sociocultural phenomena and the latter towards linguistic and stylistic issues. Hence, Zabalbeascoa's understanding of the translation process in a wider sense shows a certain parallel to Chesterman's approach (2007). Finally, in 2009, in a thematic issue of *Hermes* a plea was formulated in favour of establishing of what was labelled 'Translator Studies', focusing on the figure of the translator rather than on translations as texts (Wolf 2014: 7)

Admittedly, the last two decades of TS research have been marked by a 'sociological turn' as an ever increasing attention has been paid to the agency of translators as well as to the social factors which permeate acts of translation. The turn is evident in research employing micro-perspectives to delve into issues connected to resistance and activism (see Tymoczko 2010) and macro-perspectives to cast light on the role played by society or institutions in an intercultural communication (see Sella-Sheffy and Shlesinger 2011). Moreover, agency and social factors are being discussed in interdisciplinary terms more than ever. Nowadays, according to Angelelli (2014:1) the chief focus is on the exploration of the inter-social and intra-social agency and identity construction, on their activities and consequences thereof, but also on other phenomena such as the displacement of texts and people and issues of access and linguisticism. Perhaps most importantly, within participant-oriented research, translators as social agents have been brought into sharp focus.

Cronin (2010) mentions a relatively recent turn in TS which has been described as ‘technological’. While the previous turns in TS were mainly determined by developments in adjacent disciplines such as linguistics, cultural theory and history, the latter is the outcome of significant shifts in which translation is carried out in the contemporary world (Cronin 2010:1). Similarly, Gambier (2014:1) concurs that translating and translation are being transformed with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and a “new work environment is shaking up the translator’s world” (ibid.). With all these changes in our digital age going on, Folaron (2012:27) wisely predicts that “how languages and cultures intervene and intersect through technologies, translation and localization at different levels of the computer, ICT, Internet and Web World, in all its complex dimensions”, will be a source of reflection for many years to come. Of all contemporary strands of TS, technological TS appears to be undergoing the most radical changes and on the strength of its heterogeneity offers a wealth of new research avenues.

Over the past decade or two, three new scenarios have emerged for technological TS in total, *i.e.* audiovisual translation; localization and globalization; and corpus-based approaches. Of these, the corpus-based approach enables a thorough analysis and discovery of many traits of translated language and is driving the development of automatic machine translation. Currently, localization and globalization seems the most evident locus of contact between technology, the postmodern world and translator identity (Munday 2016:300).

‘Audiovisual translation’, ‘screen translation’, ‘multimedia translation’ or ‘vulnerable translation’<sup>6</sup>, whatever its name, has of late been marked by vivid tendencies to integrate it into broader analytical models, transcending the realm of a purely prescriptive and practice-based phenomenon. Recently, attention has moved from the study of interlingual subtitling (as present in various forms for the cinema and DVD), dubbing, surtitling (where the subtitles are projected above the stage at the opera or theatre) to intralingual subtitling for disabled groups of recipients (such as the hard of hearing) and to new forms of translations such as amateur translation<sup>7</sup> or video game translation which will now be subjected to a greater scrutiny.

The reasons for the proliferation of amateur translation in the 2010’s may be connected to the spread of the English language into all areas of the sociolinguistic reality, which has been brought about according to Krajňáková (2016:39) by two things: the loss of the hard-and-fast rule to translate into one’s native language<sup>8</sup> and growing confidence of ubiquitous translators. In addition, the preference of the present-day translation market for translations which are submitted “as quickly and cheaply as possible” also paves the way for greater tolerance for imperfect amateur translation. Despite the current efforts of accepting amateur translation in TS (see Fernández-Costales 2012:20-21), there are still very vocal others who stress its negative impact on translation quality and overall deprofessionalization of the profession of translator.

In the digital 2010’s, translation is often subsumed into the acronym GILT standing for globalization, internationalization, localization and translation (Jiménez-Crespo 2013:24-39). Localization stands for the adaptation of the product to the target locale, “the combination of a socio-cultural region and a language in industrial setting” (ibid:12). Localization may involve the substitution of inappropriate cultural symbols and the translation of text, including the need to fit specific space constraints on the page/screen. Although some nowadays admit that the difference between localization and translation may be blurred, generally localization is seen by the translation industry as a superordinate term which encompasses translation.

To sum up, the present paper has shown the huge breadth of research in contemporary TS which is increasing at an even faster pace. As follows from the preceding paragraphs, the boundaries of the discipline should be stretched by both theoretical reflection and empirical practice and their mutual cooperation. TS has been able to become a fully-fledged discipline but the price in the 2010’s seems to be its fragmentation. This brings up the question of how much dialogue exists today between TS and its potentially related sub-fields. Nowadays it is becoming virtually impossible for a TS scholar to embrace all its emergent research areas.

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