

INTRODUCTION

Why Translation Studies? Why Now?

For the first time since its appearance, the *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* devotes a monographic issue to Translation Studies. Although this is a significant move, it can hardly be considered pioneering. Translation Studies has seen its academic standing consolidated over the last twenty years, as a result of an ever increasing interest by critics and scholars. This raises the obvious questions of why has come about and why a historically important and widespread phenomenon has engendered such interest.

Obviously, one explanation lies in the effects global communication and, at the same time, the existence of multiple local differences that have turned globalization into a Babelic space instead of the expected world of uniformity. But very much doubt that the increase in communication exchanges explains the academic interest in translation. It seems that although some change is taking place it is not always of sufficient gravity to attract attention of scholars.

Interest in translation cannot be compared to that, for instance, in biogenetics. Translation has always existed so that its appeal does not lie in its novelty. Despite its historical relevance for the processes of consolidation, together with the diffusion and exchange of ideas and cultures, translation has neither been considered an object worthy of study nor a prestigious profession.

The reasons for this somewhat contemptuous attitude can be traced, I think, to a philosophical view that a copy implies a loss of the essential being; to the aesthetic notion that a work of art is the unique result of a sublime process of creation; and also to the intradisciplinary view that translation is determined by the original text and has no influence on cultures. It has been the theoretical shift towards culture produced in these fields during the last 20 years that has led to a reconsideration and reevaluation of translation.

For human beings, things are not what they are but *what they mean*. We perceive their meaning, their “value” for us, through their translation to our language. If we accept with the hypothesis that language is the conceptual basis of human disposition to translate things into the level of meaning, translation phenomena would not then be considered a secondary product and activity. Translation would not be a consequence of the development of language but, conversely, language a consequence of translation.



In aesthetics, as is well known, a work of art is no longer considered an eternal and isolated unit, protected from the changes of history. Its aesthetic value is not inherent to the object but assigned to it by an endless cultural process. Aesthetic theories are now less interested in studying the intrinsic values of works and more in the critical analysis of those circumstances which confer upon the text its consideration as a work of art. If we are concerned with the “structural properties” of a text, little information can be offered by the study of its translation. Conversely, if we want to study the historical circumstances that have made a text a work of art, there is no doubt that translation can be a rich source of information about this process. Translation becomes therefore a privileged scenario from which to observe the “social life” of discourses.

A similar paradigm shift has been taking place at an intradisciplinary level. The correction or assessment of translation is not established by the degree of correspondence with the features of the source text—lexical, syntactical, pragmatic or functional— but by its adequacy to the target communicative needs. The pragmatic approach to translation—both in its functionalist and descriptive dimensions—definitively incorporates translation studies within the paradigms determined by the cultural turn. The margin of difference or manipulation is taken for granted as an inherent factor in translation, as it is determined by criteria that do not have a fixed identity. One of the most obviously consequences is the awareness of the close relationship between translation, ideology and power. This connection yields an image of the discipline that is quite different from that innocent transference activity displayed by traditional linguistically oriented theories and turns it into a point of reference for other disciplines.

Translation Studies which derived from a number of disciplines such as applied linguistics or comparative literature, has achieved wider relevance than some of the disciplines of which it was once part of. It adopts approaches from diverse cultural and linguistic areas in order to develop specific models adapted to its specific interests and needs, attracting, at the same time, the attention of other fields. The existing dialectical relationship between translation studies and other areas of knowledge has not weakened the discipline but has helped it to become much more mature and internally stronger.

This is the nobility but also the misery of translation. Its success is based on the acknowledgment of its deeply transversal and interdisciplinary nature, but the consequence of this success is the opening-up of a field of study which is approaching the field of culture. It is as if a map were to be of the same size as the territory it represents thereby causing it to lose its operative capacity as an orientation and location tool.

Obviously, it was much easier to set the limits of the discipline when a formalist conception of translation was defended, and theories focused on linguistic systems and ignored its performance in real communicative contexts—the core of the current translation studies. Today, now that its interdisciplinary nature has been accepted, it is much more difficult to draw the external borders of the discipline. The problem is not the virtual dissolution of the discipline but its ineffectiveness.



In order to avoid the negative effects of translation's interdisciplinary nature, Andrew Chesterman, one of the contributors to this issue, points to the concept of "consilience" as the way towards which translation studies should be addressed. The plurality and fragmentation resulting from the enrichment of the discipline involves risks such as superficiality and misunderstanding of borrowed theoretical concepts and methods. Chesterman outlines a conceptual map consisting of four levels of research —textual, cognitive, sociological and cultural— to substitute the oversimplified division between linguistic and cultural studies. Causal models would allow a means to pass through them and to reach consilience. Together with the concept of causality, Chesterman mentions other bridge concepts —such as norm, translation strategy or translation instructions— to articulate the epistemological territory in a way that allows us to see the connections between translation phenomena at different levels. These connections should drive us towards consilience. Although it seems difficult to see a common position regarding basic epistemological and methodological aspects, due to the broadness of research areas involved, Chesterman identifies at least a common position with respect to the problems to be studied. He ends up suggesting the contextualization of Translation Studies in the field of memetics as a way of achieving consilience, a context more productive than pragmatics, cultural studies, or semiotics.

With their conclusions being in general agreement, Dirk Delabastita coincides with Chesterman in his point of departure: the plurality and fragmentation of Translation Studies. According to Delabastita our task as researchers consists of engaging ourselves in the complexity of reality and the commitment of trying to describe it. But academic areas are influenced by the same power dynamics as those events reflected in translation. Academic knowledge is instrumentalized making professional careers, and both university and departmental policies dependent on market mechanisms. In order to attain a prestigious and influential position, researchers forsake prudence and self-assessment and adopt a business attitude using concepts and theories as if they were goods to be sold to the academic community. Fortunately there are also researchers who assume a more dialogic vision, less profitable in the economy of fast-food concepts but more useful for the understanding of this undigested and muddled complex reality.

Delabastita's proposal is very concrete: To find a compromise making use of a "healthy pragmatism" between the innocent idealism and a cynical opportunism, without ignoring the psychological, sociological and economic implications of academia, nor to consent to them.

Chesterman's and Delabastita's proposals of consilience are raised to a speculative level, whereas Rosa Rabadán tries to put them into practice. Rabadán's contribution attempts to solve one of the continuing problematical aspects in translation studies: the division between translation research —at a theoretical and descriptive level— and practice, the difference between the intellectual sophistication of speculative approaches and the working pragmatism in the professional translation practice. From an empirical point of view the applied translation branch is not considered to have the same status as the descriptive or theoretical ones. Furthermore, on the other hand, translation practitioners and students expect the



discipline to provide them with the tools to solve practical problems and to achieve a better quality.

On the basis that translation application should be a goal of researchers and not of users, Rabadán tries to reconcile the descriptive and the applied translation branches. She makes use of contrastive analysis and descriptive techniques and corpus studies to facilitate the step from the descriptive to useful practical applications in translation teaching and practice and assessment—in this case solutions to the translation of the English simple past tense into the Spanish *imperfecto* and *pretérito*.

It should be remembered that in the evolution of translation studies it was not the “theory” that imposed its authority deductively on the “practice”, but the study of the practice that discovered how sophisticated, integrating and dynamic theories should be if they were to be aimed at the explanation of this complex and historically changing phenomenon which is translation. In reality, it was not then that the breach between theory and practice was produced, but at the moment when that gap was seen as artificial and the movement towards integration had begun.

Riitta Jääskelläinen and Pekka Kujamäk’s essay highlights the need to reconceptualize theoretical notions to relate them to the different cultural contexts that are to be researched. They reexamine the concept of “translation strategy” and call into question the generally accepted idea that foreignising implies cultural enrichment instead of promoting imperialism. This hypothesis is not confirmed when dealing with minority languages and cultures. Employing examples from the history of literary translation in Finland, the authors illustrate how cultural, economic and political reasons determined the use of either domestication or foreignization strategies, and the resulting effects they have had on the development of Finnish literature and culture and its position with respect to foreign hegemonic cultural systems.

For many years the study of translation was centred on providing solutions to specific problems and on specifying the type of relationship between two texts in order to consider it as a translation. But when from an empirical perspective the attention was focused on the study of real translated texts, these seemingly common sense translation recipes were shown to be deeply interwoven within a specific cultural context, determined, to some extent consciously, by specific economic, cultural, ideological and political factors as is shown in the Finnish example.

This relationship between translation and power from a descriptive perspective is dealt with by Raquel Merino’s presentation of Trace project and Roberto Valdeón’s analysis of digital news articles.

The aim of the TRACE collective research project is to study the Spanish history of translation of various genres—drama, narrative and films—in Francisco Franco’s time. Merino highlights the relevance of the censorship records held at the General Administration Archives as a source of information for reconstructing the creation process and reception of translated texts. Between the source text and the end product—published, shown or performed—there is a chain of intermediate texts: drafts versions, censors’ commentaries, adaptations, etc. These texts



show the traces of intervention bringing to light the textual and extratextual mechanisms at work to relate them to the expected aesthetic and ideological values. This documentation has turned out to be of great importance for the selection of representative texts that will constitute the corpus of comparable pairs contained in the last stage of the project. This is illustrated by the analysis of *The Zoo Story* and *The Boys in the Band*, two plays dealing with the “dangerous” topic of homosexuality.

The indeterminacy of new communicative contexts, such as internet, blurs traditional notions such as source culture, original text, source author/producer, target receiver and makes translation take place between indefinite poles. This might be the ideal space to achieve the expected standards of independence and objectivity in the production of news text. However, this indeterminacy in which translation takes place allows control mechanisms, political and ideological interests to be less visible than in other contexts such as non democratic systems.

Valdeón’s essay examines the ideological bias of BBCMundo’s news web translations of English BBCWorld news using Fairclough’s model of critical discourse analysis. The translation process is initiated at the source culture (UK) by an institutional cultural source (the BBC); translators, although native Spanish speakers, are also embedded in the source culture; target receivers are Spanish readers of a digital edition of a Spanish newspaper. The analysis shows how certain translation strategies —additions, omission and permutations— are used to produce texts in accordance with the ideological agenda of the news company emphasizing an ethnocentric perception of the events described.

The hybrid nature of Western societies affects inter and intranational, intralinguistic and intracultural relationships. The plurality of cultures coexisting within the same geographical borders, the ubiquity of media communication, internet, create mixed cultural codes, border writings, mestizo identities that requires the rethinking of notions such as original text, translation or national literature or culture.

Isabel Pascua’s proposal of integration through what she calls “social translation” is grounded within these multicultural societies. According to the author, writers and translators should contribute to a project on intercultural education. The project of translating multicultural stories such as those written by authors like Tololwa Mollel, Maxine Trottier or Robert Munsch, would aim at providing new generations with an intercultural understanding. However, this represents a new challenge for the translator of children’s literature. Pascua’s approach as a translator is clearly committed to the intercultural education function of these texts and it would involve the change of target-oriented domesticating strategies traditionally applied to the translation of children’s literature in favour of an approach that maintains the exotic and the unknown in the translated text. Without doubt translating multicultural literature in a multicultural society is a present-day challenge in translation studies worthy of being researched.

Another field where translation is seen as more of a social action between cultures than simply a language activity is community interpreting. This activity, which is increasingly demanded in Western multicultural societies is one of the youngest and thought-provoking research fields within translation studies. Proof of that is given by Jan Cambridge’s and Mette Rudvin’s essays.

Cambridge's paper starts by reminding us of some specific features of public service interpreting: The closeness with clients, the needed balance between the professional detachment and the feeling of empathy, the importance of corporal and emotional language in meaning, the implied asymmetry of communicative processes, etc. Cambridge goes on to draw our attention to the importance of using the interpreting impartial model in order to protect the interpreter's reputation and to transfer the message in a neutral way. The situational pressure exerted by working conditions may lead public service interpreters to engage in the mediation process, displaying their individual or collective identity and identifying themselves with one of the cultural or linguistic groups involved. But the interpreter should not operate as a full interlocutor in his/her own right. The dialogue can be de-coupled, the message titled coloured and the interpreter's individual and collective—as a member of a professional group—identity is left unprotected.

Despite this desired and intended position of impartiality, community interpreters, in Rudvin's opinion, are unavoidably visible. It is evident that the interpreter's role is still a controversial issue within the field of community interpreters. Rudvin focuses on how institutional power asymmetries inherent in institutional encounter and cross-cultural relations in Western countries affect interpreter mediated discourse. This power imbalance is manifested and negotiated through pragmatic discourse features and reflected into empowering and disempowering discourse strategies. The interpreter's source of power in interpreting encounters lies in his/her position as a language and cultural expert. This power, however, is limited to the degree institutions allow them to control the course of the communication making use of discursive strategies such as distancing or turn-taking, to ensure effective communication. There are other factors that may influence the interpreter's power management such as his/her physical presence in the encounter, stressful working situations and professional experience and other parties' acknowledgement of the interpreter's role as communication coordinator.

When I first thought of what orientation this monographic issue should have, I found it important to take into account the contextual circumstances of its publication: the channel of communication in which it is included is not a specialized translation journal, but rather an English Studies one, in a department with no research tradition in the discipline. For this reason I focused on an issue that might interest not only translation scholars but also on one that might stimulate the interest of other specialists who usually glance at the journal's content. The intended purpose was, therefore, general, informative, illustrative and even missionary.

There has been no attempt at coherence running the risk that it might have ended up being a collection of unconnected papers. The authors were asked to write an essay on what they considered controversial in Translation Studies in the West and therefore of interest to readers. The result is a body of contributions as diverse in approach as in terms of the aspects and problems they deal with. I think that they give an illustrative account of the current state of the discipline, of new and emerging interests and challenges and of the constant need to rethink and develop its theoretical frameworks and concepts to understand the ever changing nature of translation phenomena and the contexts in which they take place.



In spite of this diversity, all these papers illustrate, in some way, what I consider to be the relevance of the study of translation at this stage in the development of the discipline. The merit is twofold: Its potential as a mechanism of discovering how societies and discourses are articulated and its capacity to act socially, both to transform and to operate on the contextual environment.

I have been fortunate to bring together a number of key figures in the field of Translation Studies. I would like to express my gratitude to all of them for accepting my invitation and devoting time and effort in producing this volume. My thanks are due to the *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* editorial board for giving me the opportunity of guest-editing this special issue on Translation Studies. And finally, to my colleagues Matilde Martín and David Roberts for their invaluable help whenever it was needed.

