Conceptual tools in translation history

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A concept is a way of organizing data. And a conceptual tool is a concept that does this to a particular end, in this case to organize a particular kind of historiography. Translation history, which is here taken as including interpreting and audiovisual mediation, needs conceptual tools firstly in order to distinguish itself from other kinds of history, with which it then can and should interact. And if there is a specific circumstance in which those tools need to be special in some way, it is presumably related in part to the nature of the data, both quantitative and qualitative, entering translation history: typically there is an *abundance* of diverse linguistic information deriving from the comparison of texts, an exceptional degree of *unreliability* in paratextual pronouncements on those texts, and frequent, albeit not ubiquitous, *marginality* in the identity and milieux of translators, often requiring the indirect inferences of detective work as one goes further back in time.

The following survey of conceptual tools starts from the text-based concepts that seem to be most central to the Western translation studies, then moving to those that are process-based and more susceptible to historicize a wider range of translation forms. Attention will be paid to the inherent essentialism of most of the conceptual tools developed within Western translation studies and to the ways those concepts can run aground when confronted with a wider range of translational data. Some proposals will be made as to how a few basic categorical splits may be redressed in order to embrace a plurality of translation forms, hopefully without dissipating into positions where translation is always already everywhere.

1. Text-based translation concepts

The term ‘translation’ defines translation history yet refers to perhaps the most protean of all our concepts; it needs to be handled with care and explained on each use. The term can pick out a particular kind of *text* (spoken, written, or visual), which means that the resulting history will be based on data derived from or about texts; it can also name a particular kind of *socio-cognitive activity*, which may or may not produce a translation as a specific textual product. For example, ‘translation’ can refer to the transfer of knowledge (as it is used in medical science) or the transformative cultural practices (as in much of cultural studies), leading to a history of such transfers and practices (or indeed ‘cultural translation’). These need not be two opposed camps: there are many possible mixes of the textual and the socio-cognitive.

1.1. A metalanguage for textual translations

In text-based translation history, the minimal unit would be the relation between the translation (or *target text*) and the text it is assumed to be translated from (the *source text* or *start text*). As Toury points out (2012/1995: 47ff.), this assumed binary relation may or may not be based on archeological facts: there are also *pseudotranslations*, which are original texts presented as if they were translations, just as there are *pseudo-originals*, which are translations presented as if they were non-translations (Pym 1998: 60). The inclusion of both kinds of texts can be especially helpful when trying to discover how a particular culture defines and evaluates translations.

Once you have paired translations with their presumed start texts, it is possible to assess the types and degrees of linguistic or pragmatic changes or *shifts* (after Catford 1965), which may traditionally range from close to the start text (thus constituting high interference with target-side norms or 'foreignization,' from Schleiermacher 1963/1813) to close to the target culture (giving low interference or 'domestication'), although there are many points between these poles and other factors such as the pedagogical functions of a translation may constitute more relevant scales of analysis – there is no reason why there should be just one axis in play, or even just two.

Some translations can then be seen as *indirect translations*, when they are from a language other than the original start language (for example, in the late nineteenth century, many Western works were translated from Japanese into Chinese). *Retranslations* are when the same start text is rendered more than once into the same target language: *active retranslations* are when the translators compete against each other on the same market for one reason or another (Pym 1998: 82-83; Susam-Sarajeva 2003; Venuti 2003; Hanna 2016: 128ff.), while *passive retranslations* would be when a new translation is made because the target language has evolved or a previous translation no longer addresses a particular target market. Using these deceptively simple concepts, it is possible to draw the lines or genealogies by which texts and translations are connected in history (Text A is translated by Text B, which is translated by Text C, and so on), forming specific *traditions* for a text or string of connected renditions within and between languages, as has long been done in medieval studies.

In areas where information is abundant, *catalogues* of translations can be turned into carefully selected *corpora*, from which is it possible to measure *translation flows* between languages: how many texts are translated from a language (*extranslations*), how many are rendered into a language (*intranslations*), and what the resulting imbalances can tell us about cultural relations in the world, hegemonic or otherwise (Heilbron 2010).

Historical studies of this kind can coordinate concepts by testing several general hypotheses. For example, a proposed *law of standardization* posits that translations from dominant or prestigious cultures carry more tolerated interference than do those from non-dominant cultures (Even-Zohar 1995, Toury 2012/1995) – we imitate those we admire. A long-standing *retranslation hypothesis* proposes that successive retranslations become closer to the start text (as suggested by Goethe 1827/1819: 237ff.), although empirical studies find many other reasons and tendencies at work in retranslations (Paloposki and Koskinen 2004) – historical change habitually draws on many variables. Or again, a *concatenation effect hypothesis* (Hadley 2017) posits that indirect translations tend to be more domesticating than direct translations and are more frequently presented as pseudo-originals.

These kinds of conceptual tools enable translation history to constitute a fairly coherent discourse, with internal fields, debates, and ongoing research questions. They now do so in a way that owes relatively little to other disciplines. This discourse is more than description, though. There is no neutrality in the concepts (minimally since they are *our* concepts, working on data from different periods and cultures). Further, for many of our concepts, a certain sophistication is required if elementary mistakes are to be avoided – there are traps for beginners.

When calculating translation flows and balances, for example, care must be taken to account for the relative size of textual output in each language. By way of illustration, data from the *Index Translationum* suggest that in 2000-2005 translations accounted for 46% of the books published in Hebrew but only 16% of the books published in Arabic. Can we conclude that Hebrew-language cultures are more open than Arabic-language cultures? But then, almost three times as many *non-translational*

books were published in Arabic as in Hebrew, and the difference in translation percentages may be due to no more than that size difference (Pym and Chrupała 2004). As it happens, for 2000-2005, the actual numbers of translations are almost the same: 3902 into Hebrew and 3903 into Arabic. The manipulation of raw percentage-based concepts can be highly political.

In areas where data are scarce, there are rather different kinds of conceptual snares to watch out for. Translation traditions not infrequently point to a start text that has not been found, the technical term for which is the German *Vorlage*. Of course, an assumed *Vorlage* might not actually exist (in the case of pseudotranslations). For example, many medieval texts in Arabic were presented as translations from Greek and/or Syriac. Since the *Vorlagen* could not be found, it was thought that the Arabic translators had simply destroyed the originals, thus leading Friedrich Schlegel to label Arabs 'the annihilators among nations' (1971/1797-98; cf. Berman 1984: 59; 1985: 88, who unfortunately agreed with Schlegel). It is more likely, though, that the Arabic texts were pseudotranslations, presented as such in order to protect the authors from accusations of religious heresy (Badawi 1987: 8). None of these concepts is neutral, but some concepts are more easily turned to overtly partisan ends. As mentioned, there are traps for beginners.

1.2. A plurality of translation forms

Concepts such as the above – there are more – serve to indicate that the Western discipline of translation studies has been able to develop a relatively coherent metalanguage that can be applied to translation history. Although few of the concepts were around prior to the 1950s, there is now considerable academic consensus on their value as basic tools (we have dictionaries and guides bringing them together), to the extent that this metalanguage is something that the discipline can now *offer* in interdisciplinary exchanges—hopefully along with many more specific insights. That said, the concepts do not constitute anything like a standard best historiographical practice that might warrant an authoritative handbook. The concepts were mainly developed with reference to national European languages and cultures (Russian, Ukrainian, German, French, Czech, Slovak, Dutch, Italian, and Spanish) plus Hebrew, so there is no guarantee that they will remain pertinent elsewhere. They overwhelming refer to the translation of *written* texts, since they were developed by literary scholars and linguists – a seriously coordinated historiography of interpreting started quite late in the day (cf. Baigorri and Takeda 2016). And they have very little to say about the translational role of graphic material (the images of manuscript traditions could be related to the audiovisual possibilities of translation today). On these scores, and more, much has been left out or sidelined, and there is plenty of room for critical dissent, especially with regard to the basics.

All the above concepts can be considered *essentialist* to the extent that they assume a clear distinction between start and target, between text-based translations and non-translations, and between the language systems assumed by the status of text-based translations. In practice, those distinctions are often far from clear: every text can be seen as deriving from a series of previous texts – or so says the concept of *intertextuality* (from Kristeva 1967) – so there is rarely just one 'source' text; every text can thus be seen as bearing translational elements; and just as every language is derived from other languages and overlaps with even further languages, so there is rarely just

one ‘source’ language, at least on the long view.[1] Except for artificial or constructed situations, our very basic binary distinctions do not stand up to close historical analysis. The same critique could be elaborated for each of the basic concepts on parade above, since they assume the same binary divisions.

It is possible to claim that the foundational binarism of these traditional Western concepts derives from the kinds of translations they have been designed to talk about, or better, from the particular *translation form* assumed in that tradition – if we understand ‘form’ as a closed set of principles that relate foundational concepts. If that form is itself fundamentally binary, then it is not surprising that the associated conceptual tools share that feature. This means the concepts operate not only in the descriptive discourses but also *within* the object of knowledge itself, which is in turn reinforced by the descriptive discourses operative – we can claim no externality to the object.

In a more careful analysis of Western tradition, the very fact that a text is received as a translation activates several postulates or maxims, for which evidence can then be sought in historical data. For Toury (2012/1995: 28-31; cf. Delabastita 2003), these postulates are: 1. there is an anterior text, 2. that text is in another language, 3. there are ‘tangible’ relationships’ that tie the translation to that prior text. Those ‘tangible relationships’ might include maxims like: 3.1. ‘a presumption of complete interpretative resemblance’ (Gutt 1991: 186), 3.2. a voice where translating translators do not say ‘I’ (they use the alien-I, a first person that does not refer to the producer of translational discourse), and 3.3. a relation where, when the start text changes length, the translation changes length correspondingly (cf. Pym 2012).

Once you break a translation form down into conceptual components like this, it becomes clear that there are actually many translative practices that do *not* activate all the postulates (in another parlance, they flout some of the maxims). Indeed, there are entire cultural traditions and stretches of history where this particular set of expectations is or was simply not in place. The medieval period in Europe would consistently flout (without knowing it) our current maxims of length and the alien-I, while the long tradition of translative manuscript copying could work incrementally across dialect chains rather than jump between language systems, thus knocking out a few more of our current postulates. A medievalist who looked only for exemplars of our contemporary translation form would risk seeing ‘a millennium of translative vitality as one thousand years of non-translation’ (Beer 1989: 2).

Similarly, any half-serious investigation shows that constructs like this Western translation form are, at best, only partly present beyond European print culture. Examples of marked absence abound, and they are not without their own historical patterning. According to Semizo (2016: 283), one finds ‘no explicit reference to translation in the history of academic discourse in Japan until the eighteenth century,’ while there were other cultural practices such as *kanbun-kundoku* or ‘Chinese texts read in Japanese’ (cf. Clements in this volume). For Paker (2006: 344), Ottoman concepts of interlingual text production changed in the late nineteenth century, when translations from French were associated with a stronger sense of fidelity and accuracy and there was a ‘shift from the traditional concept of translation (*terceme*) practice which was twinned to imitation (*taklid*)’ (Saliha 2006: 345). Trivedi notes that prior to British colonization, India did not have ‘translation’ in the European sense: there was *chhaya*, shadow, ‘as if one of the languages were the shadow of the other,’ *maulika*, meaning ‘coming from the head,’ or *anuvad* as ‘saying after’ (2006: 104, 106, 107), and so on. Tschacher (2011: 27) similarly observes: ‘Up to the eighteenth century, South Asian

[1] This is one good reason for preferring the term “start text” rather than “source text.” Another good reason lies in the way translations are these days produced from translation memories, glossaries, and machine translation proposals, all of which are as much a “source” as the text the translator starts from.

Islamic literatures seem to offer very little evidence of "translations" in the narrow sense' (cf. Ricci 2011: 62), where the 'narrow' sense is basically our contemporary Western sense.

In all these cases, and there are many more, we find that something like the narrow Western sense of translation arrived in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, along with Westerners and modernity. Prior to that moment of expansion, cultures where concepts of authorship were weak tended not to have translatorship as a strongly operative concept. Seen from another perspective, when there is no strong property relationship between producer and product, when texts thus tend to belong to the public domain and are freely reworked, then translating and authoring have little reason to be distinguished from each other. The foundational concepts of our metalanguage thus lose their ground—they become categories that our vision imposes on an object that was operating in terms of other categories.

Further challenges come from flouting what we see as the maxims of length or completeness. Not infrequently do we find mediators engaged in producing texts only some of which might be called translations in a strict sense, and not because of any missing authorship. Jesuit missionaries produced some 450 texts in Chinese, of which only about 50 look like translations in our contemporary sense. The rest are partial translations, compilations of translated or paraphrased fragments, or summaries or explanations (Hsia 2007). If our translation concept really requires completeness or criteria of covariant length, then these works would have to be discounted. Yet they were produced by translators.

It is at such points that Western historiographical practice potentially runs up against translational forms that simply do not fit the Western metalanguage. The risk is that the historian simply might exclude them all as non-translations, as not belonging to translation history. The Western cultural vision would thereby be imposed on all others (since the non-fitting pieces are discarded), all history becomes Western history, and nothing is discovered beyond what one already knows.

Remarkably, as the above examples indicate, this is not what has happened in the development of translation studies. The historians tend to revel in the non-conforming material, noting the limitations of the Western concepts and plowing into non-Western fields regardless, set up dialectics of definition, discovery, and re-definition. This is the sense of Toury's (2012/1995: 26) argument against proceeding deductively from rigidly fixed definitions: the meeting of concept with data should be able to modify the concept. The risk is not really that translation historians might blind themselves to huge chunks of history. It is rather that we might fail to adapt our basic concepts to the wider tasks at hand.

2. The risk of dissipation

So should the translation historian abandon the restrictive Western translation form and open up to much wider spaces of investigation? There is nowadays a general consensus that translation historians, both West and East, should indeed be embarking on the discovery of numerous non-Western and/or pre-modern translation forms (especially since Hermans 2006). This comes with due exhortations to avoid imposing our concepts on others, along with perfunctory postcolonial commiserations and occasional lamentation of the limitations of Western concepts (see, for example, Robinson 1991; Tymoczko 2007). Rather less conceptual care has been paid to the quick presumption that one *can* actually understand all cultural concepts beyond the endemic, and indeed that there is some kind of automatic salvation in doing so.

Part of what is at stake here is the notion of equivalence or 'interpretative resemblance.' Chesterman (2006) suggests that the European terms for translation tend to stress similarity, rather than the values of difference or mediation that are more frequent in terms in other languages. The more we incorporate non-Western concepts, the more we challenge one of the defining criteria of our own metalanguage.

This in turn invites a logic of the slippery slope: if we embark on a voyage to discover *all* other translation concepts, untethered from our own core values, where does the quest stop? Surely we will finish up studying the production of *all* texts (since intertextuality does not stop), *all* acquired cultural practices (since every practice is learned from prior practices) and indeed *all* knowledge (since the construction of all knowledge draws on other knowledge). So where do we draw the line?

In the examples cited above, solutions to this problem are mostly on the level of tacit compromise. The historian initially uses the translation form that is most in tune with the texts being studied: Western for the West, Eastern for the East, Medieval for the Medieval, and so on. And if that creates problems, then boundaries are bent. Friedlander, for example, states that 'rather than imposing an outside definition of "translation" upon [texts retold in Hindi], we can confidently claim that Sanskrit and Persian texts were being written anew in Hindi prior to the nineteenth century' (Friedlander 2011: 55). The frame thus confidently becomes anything 'written anew', the vagaries of which are left to gain content in the process of actual description.

That kind of compromise can work well enough, yet it does little to produce new concepts or refine old ones. It devolves into muddling anecdote, which is indeed what we mostly find.

Alternatively, one might also start writing the history of Western translation using Eastern concepts, or of modernist translation using a medieval form. The conflicting frames then isolate the exceptions, the cases that force us to rethink our categories. Something like that could be happening when the 'written anew' concept is applied to a longish stretch of history: it is within such a wider frame that one can then trace the histories of particular translation forms, including the Western form that dominates today.

Even then, though, the temptation is to allow translation history to become applied comparative literature or world literature, potentially indistinct from the traditional studies of writers' 'fortunes' and 'influences,' even when astutely re-branded as 'post-translation studies' (Gentzler 2017). As our examples suggest, what is at stake here is actually more like 'pre-translation studies,' the range of concepts that were operative *prior to* or *outside of* the Western translation form. What is also at stake is how much we want our histories to look like literary studies, based on a series of texts.

A further temptation is to accept the more general usages of 'cultural translation' as a set of cultural practices born of displacement. When, for example, Bhabha (2004/1994) speaks of 'a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation' (10), 'the borderline condition of cultural translation' (11), the 'process of cultural translation, showing up the hybridity of any genealogical or systematic filiation' (83), or 'cultural translation, hybrid sites of meaning' (234), the translation concept is so vague and multiform, and it can embrace so many different cultural practices, that it finishes up saying very little about them.

Few translation historians have been tempted into those waters. Most dip their feet and wade around the edges, noting the conceptual difficulties but not entirely abandoning the binary concepts they came with.

Where to stop? A politic solution would be to insist that translation history, at least of the kind that wants to be in contact with translator training, concerns the translating of *texts* (written, spoken, and/or graphic) and that all binary concepts can be

reworked except that one. Where no specific text is being worked on, we might leave the practice to cultural studies. This proposal has the virtue of being based on a whole inherited metalanguage that is profoundly text-based; it can work from the West into more challenging climes and still have something to say. Before embracing it, though, we should insist that not all our inherited concepts are text-based.

3. Process-based translation concepts

Delabastita (2003) recognizes the disciplinary need to return to the very basics of the translation form and re-analyze it in more creative ways. In terms of cognitive science, he sees translation research as being problematic in that 'it dealt with prototypical forms of translation rather than with the more eccentric or doubtful specimens of the category: it bestowed all its scholarly favours on the 'robins' and the 'sparrows' of translation and paid scant attention to the 'ostriches' or 'penguins' of the category' (2003: 9). One is not sure that recitative epic traditions or audiovisual translation should really be considered 'eccentric or doubtful' in themselves: they were merely peripheral in the historical development of the Western metalanguage. Delabastita (2003: 10-11) also underscores the possibilities of going beyond text-based research, since corpus linguistics now allows us to say interesting things about the development of translation discourse at a level *above* individual texts, just as the presence of non-translated elements within translations deserves to be conceptualized at a level *beneath* that of the whole text. One might add here that the historians of ideas (in the sense of *Begriffsgeschichte*) quite regularly do translation history without being restricted to the whole text as a unit of analysis: they more happily trace the adventures of concepts as words-for-things (see, for example, Burke and Richter 2012).

One might nevertheless insist that both these supra-textual and the infra-textual levels of analysis are still based on practices where people have been translating texts. The challenge to a text-based restriction of translation history here seems rather insubstantial. And there is quite another dimension waiting in the wings.

If most text-based concepts seem condemned to repeat initial binarisms, this may not be so true of the many variables that can be considered from the perspective not of *what* translators produce, but of *how* they produce it. Here we encounter a range of considerations: the various technologies of production, collaborative networks, the professional workplaces involving translators, their cognitive processes, their social contexts, and especially the reception of translations and the repetition of production cycles. These are all aspects that can take translation history beyond the translation as text.

Let us consider a handful of these process-based concepts.

3.1. Spoken vs. written vs. mental translation

Many researchers accept as unproblematic the current professional division whereby translation involves writing, while *interpreting* (or *interpretation* in the United States) is the corresponding oral activity. This is a distinction not just between texts as such, but between the ways texts are produced. That distinction has nevertheless hardly ever had traction prior to the Western twentieth century: written and oral were often thought about together in the one concept and were mostly carried out by the same people. And today there are many practices that combine both: court and deposition interpreters can work from simultaneous written transcripts; speech-to-text translations are on our television screens and in our audiovisual communications, and the text-to-speech mode

that has long been termed ‘sight translation’ could equally be called ‘sight interpreting.’ If the modes can easily be mixed, should their histories really be so different?

Terminologically there are several alternatives available here: 1. One can use the term ‘translator’ for people who only produce written translations; one can then use the term *interpreter* for oral and signed work (in the case of interpreting for the deaf or hard of hearing); 2. One can insist that ‘translators’ produce texts that are oral, written, or indeed signed; 3. One can resort to a superordinate such as *mediator*, which would cover all these activities and more. In the various concepts corresponding to these terms, the emphasis has tended to shift from the product to the producer, from text to the person, although text-based work is always involved. This shift might help us solve the problem of how to delimit translation history: if it is not an account of a certain kind of text, it might yet trace the past of a certain kind of mediation activity.

The need for special concepts for the history of interpreting might appear to be based on a simple material fact: written texts survive (for a while), whereas spoken renditions are lost. Since historiography requires the survival of quantitative and qualitative data, it is mainly a matter of written texts. That distinction is obviously belied by current electronic technologies, yet the technological predominance of the written cannot be understated. When Gaiba (1998) set out to write the history of the 1945-46 Nuremberg Trials, she dreamt of locating recordings and films that would reveal key insights or errors. Alas, the recordings had not stood the test of time – her history had to be based on written accounts alone, mostly the memoirs of those involved. Even the transcripts of the trials would not faithfully reveal the oral dimension, since there are accounts of interpreters going upstairs after their sessions to alter the transcripts, presumably to hide traces of error. Indeed, more generally, what counts in court is not what is said, but what is written. The spoken has to be gouged out from behind the written.

The historiography of the unwritten word thus has its special methods, working not from the text but from accounts of what preceded and followed the text. There are several ways in which non-written mediation can be detected. Here are some examples, to be added to the Nuremberg case:

1. We gather from prefaces and external accounts that some of the translations done in twelfth-century Hispania were rendered orally by a Jew or Mozarab from Arabic into Romance, then written down in Latin by a Christian monk. It is claimed that traces of this oral transition through Romance can be detected in the Latin (Opelt 1959:139; d’Alverny 1968:134; Jacquart 1989:117), even though the actual spoken intermediary versions are lost to history.
2. In a study of torture practices in early modern France, Cohen (2016) observes that the written records shift between normal indirect speech in French (‘the accused said…’) and quoted direct speech in local languages such as Occitan. This is presumed to indicate that the interrogations were conducted in the local language and then translated by the recorder. The traces of non-translation would then mark key items of testimony for which it was considered necessary to have a verbatim account, or perhaps to add touches of local color in the guise of authentic suffering. There was translation, even though we cannot pair the texts.
3. In East Asian history, there are practices whereby communication takes place between spoken languages through shared literary Sinitic. Scholars and diplomats could thus engage in ‘brush dialogues’ where they would write characters that they would each pronounce differently. An example is a 1579 meeting between a Vietnamese scholar-envoy and a Korean historian (Woodside

1998: 198); other cases are recorded of Korean envoys to China (Evon 2009). There was thus mental interpreting of a kind, and a text was involved, but there were not two texts that could be called start and target.

4. Similar difficulties ensue from *kundoku*, an early modern practice where Sinitic characters were glossed to indicate a Japanese version 'that was not usually written down but was voiced, either mentally or aloud' (Clements 2014: 105) such that '[i]t is now impossible to tell which language was in the mind of the author when it was written' (110).

The media in all such events disrupt the binary matching of start and target, thus challenging the very bases on which Western Translation Studies has built its concepts.

Other differences concern not variation in technologies as such, but *degrees of mediation*. In southern Sudanese courts, the role of the translator is reported as merging with that of the *agamlong*, 'repeater of speech,' who controls turns and repeats in a loud voice that which has been said:

> He is the interpreter, the one who makes quiet voices louder, the repeater: *mutarjim* [translator] in Arabic. We call it *nve wandi so*: one who makes the word wider. Or *nve vagbi so*: one who makes clear, who reveals secrets; who doesn't hide things; who goes straight, not around the bush. (Balanda Viri elder Wau, in English, cit. Leonardo et al. 2010: 33; with thanks to Harold Lesch)

In this case, the language-switching that seems so central to the Western translation form becomes secondary to an activity of general dissemination, which can function equally well within the same language or in cognate varieties: the important function is not the language but the 'making clear.' In this, the Sudanese concept rejoins the Arabic verb *tarjama*, which can mean to explain, to give a reason for, to convey speech, to give a title to something, or to translate. Traditions based on this conceptual extension (for example, the Malay/Indonesian for translation is 'terjemahan') may seem not to do much translating. Yet one might also ask why translators in the Western tradition seem not to do much *tarjama* (Harry Aveling, personal communication).

On all these counts – weak authorship, challenges to textual unity, continua of mediation modes – we are forced to recognize that the initial division between the spoken and the written does not obtain universally.

3.2. Technologies as the driving force

Marxist history posits that substantial social change comes from the relations of production and that the main motor behind those relations is technology. Whole societies changed because of the horse, the windmill, the steam engine, or computer technology, and the way people translated changed accordingly. For translators, the long-term impact of technologies is channeled through the media by which work is organized and distributed: the alphabet, wax tablets, paper, print, the steam press, film, audio technology (for simultaneous interpreting), the personal computer and the Internet have all had major impacts on translation processes. We too easily forget that writing itself is a major technology, as is the electronic extension of the human voice. Oral and written are technological media.

Sociologically, technologies tend not to replace one another entirely but instead form generational layers or usages in special areas. One of the regular consequences of the corresponding multiplication of technologies is a progressive division of labor, in the sense that work becomes more and more specialized. In the translation field, this can

be seen in the way interpreting historically separated from written translation once its own technologies were available. We might find something similar in the separating out of literary translators (on the basis of resistance to technology?), sworn/authorized translators (who use the technologies of the courts, online glossaries, and the like) and audiovisual translators. The division of labor can be traced through the progressive founding of associations for each of these groups (Pym 2014).

In proposing a 'media history of translation,' Littau (2011) is aware that technologies are not fatalities: each new medium sets up a range of possibilities between which social actors choose, and different translation cultures may choose differently. For example, in the absence of writing, a recitative epic tradition will typically not have strong authorship concepts and will thus not have a special status for translators, but it may evoke a kind of authorship, and thus translatorship, when it distinguishes between foreign and domestic epic material. Or again, the wax tablets used in Rome facilitated modes of revision that were more individual and pedagogical than those allowed by the production of relatively cheap paper from the thirteenth century in Europe, yet both technologies allowed for degrees of collaborative translation. Perhaps the greatest impact on translation concepts ensued from print, which had wide-ranging consequences, from the standardization of vernaculars through to the enhanced distribution of texts that had acquired a monetary value (Pym 2018).

It seems not entirely accidental that what we are calling the Western translation form rose with the development of print culture in Europe, developed as a part of nationalist modernity, then travelled out all over the world as a companion of railway lines, the steam press, and the cultural hegemony of the West. Nor is it entirely accidental that post-print electronic technologies are opening up forms of collaborative translation that are in many ways reminiscent of pre-print medieval translation practices (Pym 2015).

3.3. Intercultural positions

In situations where analytical concepts cannot be based on adequate textual evidence, historians are obliged to work from external accounts, as in the above examples. In principle, this need not entail any concepts that are specific to translation history – the work has more to do with the evaluation of evidence in terms of pragmatic situations. Some inferences may be based on assumed historical norms of translation, but the actual analysis can draw quite freely on areas such as workplace studies, social network analysis, the sociology of professions, trust theory, agent-principal theory, systems theory, actor-network analysis, risk analysis, complexity theory, and agent-based simulations, for example. Since translation is a cognitive and social activity, it is subject to the same kinds of analysis as any other cognitive and social activity, even though each particular approach seems somehow condemned to be proclaimed as a 'turn' in the development of the discipline.

One thus finds historical studies on the training of translators (cf. Skalweit 2017), just as there are fragments to be found on their employment conditions, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, technologies, and ideological positions – although one might lament the absence of full dedicated studies on such aspects.

If one looks for translation-specific concepts in this field, the results seem to concern questions of degree rather than nature. For instance, the constitution of trust is especially important any situation where clients and end-users cannot directly judge the quality of a product, and translating is one such social activity. That is, although trust is involved in any social transaction, it is especially critical in communication between cultures, where the areas of doubt and potential betrayal are greater. The history of

translation can thus be written in a relatively non-binary way from the perspective of a history of trust relations (Rizzi, Lang and Pym, 2019). Or again, the ability to operate in terms of two or more cultures, adopting a series of intercultural positions, would seem to be of particular pertinence to the cognitive activities of translators, although their hypothetical membership of professional 'intercultures' (Pym 2014/2000) would be alongside a series of other communicators, from diplomats to smugglers. The concept of interculturality also allows a relatively non-binary approach to translation history. And to go one step further, translators would seem to be particularly involved in the constitution and maintenance of borders between cultures, as part of what has elsewhere been conceptualized as 'boundary maintenance systems' (after Parsons 1951: 323). Border studies these days are more likely to concern hybrid writers and migration groups than translators in any narrow sense, but they should also include translators.

Similar cross-disciplinary enrichment can be found in the concept of 'collaborative translation' (Bistué 2013, Cordingley ed. 2016), which draws on postmodern demystification of the single author (the 'death of the author' proclaimed in Foucault and Barthes) to reveal the extent to which translating has long been an affair of teamwork and cooperation, not just between translators but also with clients, area experts, and editors. Bistué (2013: 4) argues that in the early modern period 'translators and authors had to invest a large amount of effort in defining translation as the task of an individual whose product offers a single, unified version' precisely because the actual translating processes were far from individualistic.

The need to draw on concepts from other disciplines should theoretically augur well for the interdisciplinary of translation history. The kinds of process concepts we have been looking at here fit in well with general skepticism of national frame in studies of literature, culture, and general historiography; we should have little trouble docking with projects in *histoire croisée* (Werner and Zimmermann 2004); we could be in demand whenever the borders of nations no longer separate effective cultures.

4. Where concepts work

A sobering reminder of our human limitations is that all histories are written in their present. Not only is the historian in the present, with a certain network of knowledge, relations with clients (funders, publishers, higher-education institutions), and hopefully some readers, but all the data that are worked on, all the primary texts, genealogies, images, metatexts, prior histories and the rest, all of that is also in the present. More, if these materials exist in the present, it is because they have been brought over from other places, across time and space. People have invested resources so that the archives and libraries endure across time; further effort and resources are expended so that texts are bought, stored, indexed, and made available electronically; and still more expenditure occurs as researchers go to where the texts are, or go out to foreign cultures in search of data on their past. None of that expenditure is neutral; all of it takes place in terms of certain interests and desires. In the humanities, if you find data, it is because someone worked to make data available to you. Since some data are inevitably discarded or left in places where they are difficult to locate, the things we most easily find tend to be what others have wanted us to find; when we seek what is most hidden, more work is required.

This reminder is necessary not only to question illusions of descriptive neutrality, as if the historian had teleported to the past: it should also help explain some of the special difficulties facing translation history. Most of the data that we work with have been gathered and transmitted by people working in other fields, with other interests, and other criteria. For example, indexes are kept of authors, but less frequently

of translators. Biographical records are kept of the principals of international relations, but seldom of the mediators. Literatures are catalogued and conceptualized in terms of national languages, in what Even-Zohar (1990: 57) describes as 'tendentiously nationalistic literary historiography,' but the catalogues rarely include translations as works of national literature (Rosa 2003). Cultural change is often recorded as coming from within the internal configurations of national systems – even the translation history informed by the concepts of polysystems theory gives causation to central and peripheral locations (Even-Zohar 1978) –, making intercultural networks and professional communities difficult to identify and substantiate. Most of the dominant concepts by which data are made available are framed and financed by national authorities. The one major exception might be the *Index Translationum*, a commendable if flawed international effort to catalogue translations, which had its origins in the League of Nations in the 1930s, was developed under UNESCO, and was then discontinued around 2015. Studies of mediation and interculturality still require extra effort from historians.

This also means that some of the concepts we use to think about our work are strongly illusory. One talks, for example, of entering into 'dialogue' with the past, of gaining 'understanding' of distant people, of seeking 'historical justice' for those who are no longer with us. And then, if you work very hard, gathering enough details about the distant person or object, entering into microhistory (Adamo 2006, Munday 2014) or mimicking the repeated interviews and meticulous compilations of actor-network theory (Buzelin 2007) you might feel that you have really broken the bonds of your own time and place, entering the 'utterly alien,' with all the excitement thus entailed. Such personifying concepts help provide the motivation we need in order to keep going, given the extra work required. But they are illusions nevertheless. Translation history works on the problems of the present.

To thus give 'priority to the present' (Pym 2014/2000) should not entail that the concepts of our present are imposed on the entire past. Far from it: the priority of the present should be seen more readily as a materialist call for reflexivity, for critical attention to the reasons why we expend energy, here and now, in one kind of historiography or another. Just as we are now used to analyzing translations in terms of the milieux in which they were produced and received – with a certain training, for a certain clientele, with reference to certain ideologies – we should be able to apply the same kind of situational thought to our own work. If microhistory seduces us into the details of the 'utterly alien' (Adamo 2006), it is because we seek precisely that encounter with exotic otherness, enthralled by the illusion of authenticity, narrative escapism, and momentary denial of self-reflexivity. And if, for example, Western scholars exhort us to go out in search of non-Western conceptualizations of translation (Robinson, Tymoczko, Venuti, and Hermans, for example), the call is entirely within the spirit of an adventurous modernity, heading out into the world to expand the limits of Western science. At the same time, though, the self-critical Western discourse can be embraced wholeheartedly in East Asian translation studies, which operate in quite different present-time situations.

Whatever the case, acceptance of the wider frames is a popular solution in the United States, where there is relatively little formal training of translators and the discipline of translation studies has thus tended to be housed in departments of comparative literature. Outside those departments and their spheres of influence, there might be reason to seek more careful ways of reconceptualizing translation forms.

Further Reading

Pym, Anthony (2014/2000) *Method in Translation History*. London and New York, Routledge.

A presentation of translation history as a series of methodological concepts. Since the work is based on two European projects, it does not deal with extra-European history and it finds little place for spoken forms of translation.

Rizzi, Andrea, Birgit Lang, and Anthony Pym (2019) *What is translation history? A trust-based approach*. Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.

A set of arguments for placing trust at the center of translation history, asking not only how and why translators are trusted or distrusted but also how translation historians seek trust with respect to other historians and other academic disciplines.

Rundle, Christopher (2012) "Translation as an approach to history", *Translation Studies* 5(2): 232-240.

Rundle proposes that instead of writing the history of translation, we can use translations as a way of studying more general history and that descriptive concepts should be adapted from other disciplines accordingly. The journal includes significant replies by Delabastita, Hermans, St-Pierre, and further comments are in Olohan (2014) and D'hulst (2015).

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