

# Transdisciplinarity

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“**B**oth translation studies and cultural studies have come of age. Both interdisciplines have entered a new internationalist phase, and have been moving for some time away from their more overtly parochial and Eurocentric beginnings, towards a more sophisticated investigation of the relationship between the local and the global. Both are now vast wide-ranging fields, within which there is no consensus, but neither are there radical disagreements that threaten fragmentation or destruction from within. There are now clearly several areas that would lend themselves fruitfully to greater cooperation between practitioners of both interdisciplines.

- There needs to be more investigation of the acculturation process that takes place between cultures and the way in which different cultures construct their image of writers and texts.
- There needs to be more comparative study of the ways in which texts become cultural capital across cultural boundaries.
- There needs to be greater investigation of what Venuti has called ‘the ethnocentric violence of translation’ and much more research into the politics of translating.
- There needs to be a pooling of resources to extend research into intercultural training and the implications of such training in today’s world.

It is not accidental that the genre of travel literature is providing such a rich field of exploration by both translation studies and cultural studies practitioners, for this is the genre in which individual strategies employed by writers deliberately to construct images of other cultures for consumption by readers can be most clearly seen.

In pointing out that none of us are able to comprehend fully the entirety of the complex network of signs that constitutes culture, Raymond Williams effectively freed us from the old myth of the definitive version of anything. His thesis also offers a way forward that invites a collaborative approach, for if the totality is denied the individual, then a combination of individuals with different areas of expertise and different interests must surely be advantageous. Both cultural studies and translation studies have tended to move in the direction of the collaborative approach, with the establishment of research teams and

groups, and with more international networks and increased communication. What we can see from both cultural studies and translation studies today is that the moment of the isolated academic sitting in an ivory tower is over, and indeed in these multifaceted interdisciplines, isolation is counterproductive. Translation is, after all, dialogic in its very nature, involving as it does more than one voice. The study of translation, like the study of culture, needs a plurality of voices. And, similarly, the study of culture always involves an examination of the processes of encoding and decoding that comprise translation. (pp. 138-139)

LOURENS J. DE VRIES

From: **“Runny icky material moved into liquid from the wind blowing on it: linguistics as translation”**.

**L**inguistics and translation theory used to have a somewhat asymmetrical relationship, with the latter graciously emphasizing that she needed linguistics (along with other partners, to be sure) but with only very few linguists acknowledging that they needed translation theory or translation studies. In fact, there was a time that translation theory, especially in the field of Bible translation, was dominated by linguistics, with translation theory almost becoming an applied subfield of linguistics. The truth is that linguistics very badly needs translation studies as an autonomous, independent discipline, especially when translation studies embraces a broader, transdisciplinary perspective that sees translation as an instantiation of more general cognitive and cultural processes of the creation, communication and transformation of meaning, within and across cultures. There are many reasons why linguistics needs translation studies. Here are the most important. First, translation studies can save linguistics from the follies of extreme universalism and extreme relativism. Second, linguistic description of the languages of the world crucially involves translation, and it is very dangerous for linguists to leave that translation aspect of their work untheorized.

Translation studies is a discipline predicated on difference, as is translation itself. The very act of translating emphasizes differences between people. But emphasizing differences is not innocent. And disciplines predicated on difference such as translation studies and cultural anthropology may have an uneasy relationship with this focus on difference. Modern anthropologists sometimes deal with this uneasiness by downplaying Otherness and by refusing to portray the people they study as Exotic Others. They have a history of colonial anthropology to come to terms with, an anthropology that emphasized Otherness and a West that never would meet the East.

Translators and students of translation are pulled into opposite directions. There is fear to lose Otherness in translation, a fear to tame and domesticate the Other Culture in translation and at the same time the fear to lose the audience, the awareness that transla-

tors are 'doomed' to communicate with audiences in the terms of those audiences. Even translators committed to conveying the very Otherness of the source text and source culture have to do so in terms of Otherness that the audience can relate to, that is the paradox of exoticization. The most exoticizing translations of the Bible invariably turned out to be monuments to the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit, ideologies and mentality of their time and place. For example, the German translation of the Hebrew Bible by Buber and Rosenzweig tried very hard to capture the Hebrew Otherness in the translation but it is a monument to German Neo-Romanticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, more specifically a monument to German Neo-Romantic understanding of Hebrew Otherness.

Translators become acutely aware of two things at the same time: of linguistic and cultural otherness and difference, of gaps and divides on the one hand, and of continuities, bridges and overlap on the other hand. This specific sensitivity to both gaps and bridges, to cultural continuity and discontinuity, should be celebrated as the heart of translation studies because one of the central and lasting contributions of translation studies to the humanities is to be an antidote to the distorting impact of ideologies of both universalism and relativism. When linguistics was in the iron grip of naïve universalism, with 'universal grammar' and with 'universal meanings' (mostly English words in capitals), it was among students of translation that the awareness of the incommensurability problem, of limits to translatability and of the very real, deep differences between languages and cultures was kept alive. And when the ideological pendulum swings back to relativism and towards denials of very real cross-linguistic and cross-cultural continuities, it is in the field of translation that the awareness of such continuities remains alive.

Translation is core business for any linguist. This insight was never totally lost in linguistics (e.g. Grace 1981: 36: "Translation is a *sine qua non* in the analysis of a new language"). But few linguists see the core role of translation in their work, let alone that they use the insights from translation studies to illuminate this core element. When linguists are aware of the central place of the translational element in their work and when they theorize that translational aspect, the quality of their work dramatically increases, for example

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in functional, typological, and anthropological frameworks, history and theory of Bible translation in the broader context of translation studies, linguistic aspects of (Bible) translation processes, skopos theory and effective communication in Bible translations, and Bible translations in languages of Asia and Oceania. His recent publications are *The Korowai of Irian Jaya. Their Language in its Cultural Context* (Oxford University Press, 1997), *A Short Grammar of Inanwatan, an Endangered Language of the Bird's Head of Papua, Indonesia* (Australian National University Press, 2004), "Areal pragmatics of New Guinea: Thematization, distribution and recapitulative linkage in Papuan languages" in *Journal of Pragmatics* 38 (2006), "Translation Functions and Interculturality" in *Translation and Interculturality: Africa and the West*, vol. 16 (2008), and "From clause conjoining to clause chaining in the Dumut languages of New Guinea" in *Studies in Language Series* (Peter Lang, 2010).

in increased focus on the emic, language-specific and unique meanings of simple constructions such as adnominal genitives or coordinated nouns that look deceptively similar and 'universal' under the guise of English translation equivalents (see Reesink 2008 for the role of translation in linguistics in relation to Pike's notion of emic/etics). (pp. 1-2)

[...]

Linguists are often incredibly unreflective and naïve in providing glosses and translations; they should learn from translation studies to critically reflect on the skopos of their translations and on what is lost and gained in translation. Many linguists would look at the situation that the Atsugewi utterance wanted to describe, for example rotten tomatoes blowing into a pond, and then translate according to that denotation, with something like 'rotten tomatoes blew into the water'. There is a very real danger that constructions are classified and understood by linguists in terms of the English translation equivalents, for example Papuan thematic constructions that were classified as relative or adverbial clauses because they were translated in English with adverbial and/or relative clauses (De Vries 2005; 2006). English, the language of international grammar writing, is an enemy linguists rarely recognize as such. Just like Latin in the past, English easily becomes a channel through which grammars of other languages are forced to flow when linguists do not pay attention to the insights of students of translation.

Linguistics is a form of translation with a very specific scholarly skopos: to translate the categories and distinctions of the lexicons and the grammars of the languages of the world in an English-based metalanguage with strong traces of an earlier Latin-based linguistic metalanguage, with categories such as ablative, switch reference, noun phrase, inalienable, animate, direct object and with English lexical glosses such as 'move', 'hit' and 'black'. The grammatical terms such as 'relative clause' and 'first person', the lexical glosses such as 'hit' and 'move' and the translations of the utterances of the object language ('runny icky material') are all part of 'linguistic' in the context of grammar writing, that is English as a linguistic metalanguage. This translational process of object language categories into metalanguage categories can only be done properly when linguists are constantly aware of the need to force their English-based metalanguage away from the categories and distinctions of English as a natural language. This in turn can only be done when the English-based linguistic metalanguage is transformed and sharpened by the study of as many languages as possible, languages with different lexical and grammatical categories such as Atsugewi or Spanish.

When I was a young linguist my discipline had almost absorbed translation theory, now that I am no longer all that young I find myself arguing that linguistics would improve dramatically if it could look at itself from the perspective of a broadly defined field of trans-disciplinary translation studies. Had it embraced the lessons of translation studies on the deep differences between languages and cultures, it would have been spared the unfruitful episode of pointless universalism. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the temporary dominance of linguistics in translation theory was the reduction of translation to a 'purely' linguistic process, a process of words, phrases and sentences only; for a while this reduction

hid the true nature of interlingual translation as a social and cultural process that can only be understood in wider cognitive contexts of the creation and transformation of meaning in and across cultural boundaries. (pp. 3-4)

PATRICIA WILLSON

**“Translation as a metaphor in scientific discourse”.**

**T**his still incipient research aims at exploring the metaphoric uses of translation to account for transformations concomitant with a certain degree of invariance in the field of science and technique. It aims as well at inquiring into the possible connections between such uses and metaphors of translation already studied in philosophy, anthropology, sociology, among other disciplines.

The field explored insofar is molecular biology, an avant-garde domain in scientific discourse in the sixties and seventies. In 1961, biochemists François Jacob and Jacques Monod proposed a model to explain deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) duplication and protein synthesis in the cell. They used the terms *code*, *transcription* and *translation*, and called *messenger RNA* (mRNA) the chain of ribonucleic acid required as an intermediate in such duplication. The terminology shows that translation is ‘the scene of striking metaphoric’ not only in the field of social sciences. In 1970, in his *Le hasard et la nécessité*, Monod analyzed the implications of the discovery in the history of sciences, and claimed that “the fundamental biologic invariant is DNA”, and that «the process of translation by which DNA duplicates» is «uni-directional», and is, in this sense, a “Cartesian” and not a “Hegelian” process. In a famous statement that completed Francis Crick’s “central dogma of molecular biology” and has been often refuted since then (In 1970, Howard Temin demonstrated that genetic information in retroviruses is stocked in RNA and transcribed into DNA; in other words, the duplication occurs the other way around, due to the existence of *reverse transcriptase*, and proceeding through a ‘back translation.’), Monod maintained that it is unconceivable that DNA duplication occurs backwards.

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Following the model by Jacob and Monod, some mechanisms of gene expression have been referred to by molecular biologists as ‘translational control’, ‘translational regulation’, ‘translation inhibition’, ‘translation masking’ and so forth. However, since the target of this research is not science itself but the ideas suggested by scientific discourse, the corpus to examine is also composed by texts where these ideas are supported, contested or invested with different or vaster implications. For instance, in *Hermès III. La traduction*, the philosopher of science Michel Serres refers to Monod’s claims and gives them a wider frame: he affirms that science is the set of invariant messages in every optimal translation situation; when this maximum is not attained, we are in one of the other cultural fields. According to Serres, translation goes across the most diverging fields, hence the interest in studying translating processes, not in abstract, but in the concrete transformations they operate.

