# Introduction

## Martha Tennent

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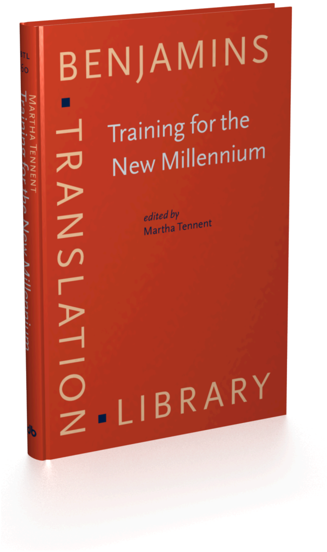

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# Introduction

## Martha Tennent

This collection of essays originated at the Forum on translation pedagogy held in May 1999 at the University of Vic's School of Translation and Interpreting, Facultat de Ciències Humanes, Traducció i Documentació. Or more precisely, the essays presented here are a consequence of it. They are not conference papers, however, but were commissioned in response to some of the issues that arose during the Forum. These essays attest to important changes in translation practice and the assumptions which underpin them.

Under the title "Training translators and interpreters: New directions for the millennium", the Vic Forum brought together leading specialists from some twenty-five countries. But what, to my mind, made the Forum unique was its structure: the meeting was conceived as a platform for debate, a site for examining critically different positions regarding translator/interpreter training. In an effort not to privilege any one approach, the 31 invited speakers represented distinct and often diametrically opposed approaches: varieties of linguistics and empiricism, polysystem theory and functionalism, literary and cultural studies. Debate was stimulated by the request that panelists submit, a month in advance, written papers which were then book bound and posted to all participants. Panels were organised thematically, in the fashion typical of academic conferences. Yet on the assumption that panelists and participants had read the papers beforehand, panelists were restricted to an initial presentation of key points. After these presentations, the discussion was opened to the audience. Every effort was made to create panels that included scholars representing different positions. The number of participants in the Forum was also limited in order to encourage discussion.

What became apparent from the beginning were precisely the differences and divisions, which were, more often than not, irreconcilable. The epistemological dilemma that lies at the base of Translation Studies was evident in most of the debates, most particularly in the opposing poles of linguistics (primarily text linguistics and pragmatics) and cultural studies (primarily forms of ideological critique, including feminist and post-colonial theory, among others), which are commonly viewed as the central bifurcation within the discipline.

Some of the panelists perceived Translation Studies to be a science that must be submitted to the rules and protocols of scientific research. Andrew Chesterman argues in his report on the Vic Forum in *Across the Boundaries: Language and Culture* that the basic methodology of translator training should be empirical, and that many notions about hypothesis-testing and prediction can be adapted from an empirical human science such as sociology, much in line with the thinking of panelists Gideon Toury and Miriam Shlesinger. Sergio Viaggio, Chesterman notes, presented a view that was quite similar to applied science, based on a general model of verbal communication which was specified to address "mediated intercultural interlingual communication." Elaborated together with Mariano García Landa, this model distinguishes certain elements within the linguistic chain – although Viaggio made clear that translation cannot be treated simply as a branch of linguistics – and is represented by means of symbolic notations such as those commonly used in science.

Some panelists and participants, such as Roger Bell and Viggo Pedersen, approach Translation Studies from a linguistics point of view. One of Bell's main arguments was that in order to work towards developing a definition of translation one needs to devise a system of empirically-assessed criteria regarding communication, taking into account such issues as mode of communication and channel type (auditory, visual and tactile) and the distinction between mono-communication and bilingual communication (i.e. translation). If in the 1980s Bell considered translation theory to be part of applied linguistics – insofar as it applies the tools of linguistics to the solution of cultural problems such as the cross-cultural transfer of meaning – by the end of the 1990s he was advocating that translation theory be considered apart from applied linguistics, which would nonetheless be used to study and practice translation. Even those present at the Forum who strongly believe that Translation Studies should be grounded in linguistics grant that contemporary linguistics has changed considerably since the time when J.C. Catford confidently asserted that "the theory of translation is concerned with a certain type of relation between languages and is consequently a branch of Comparative Linguistics."

Other participants, such as Rosemary Arrojo, Sherry Simon, and Lawrence Venuti find their roots in literary theory and criticism and cultural studies. Cultural studies examines a broad range of forms and practices in their social and political situations. It questions essentialist notions of the neutrality of culture, as well as the privileging of elite over popular cultural products. It is interdisciplinary, drawing its research tools from various fields. Like other approaches to translation, cultural studies also benefits from an empirical processing of data, although with the important difference that it views the selection and processing of any data, not as value-free, but as reflecting certain social and institutional interests.

The methodological divisions in Translation Studies were especially evident during what was perhaps the most spirited debate in the Forum, sparked by the phonemic, experimental translations by Louis and Celia Zukofsky of Catullus that appeared in the 1960s (the opposing views were represented by, *inter alios*, Theo Hermans, Gideon Toury and Lawrence Venuti). These homophonic renderings stretch the entire concept of translation to accommodate a disjunctive modernist poetics rooted in sounds, images, cultural impact. By producing a hybrid text which emphasised a discursive heterogeneity – drawing on a whole range of colloquialisms, slang, jazz talk, scientific terms, archaisms – the Zukofskys' renderings challenged the prevalent translation standard for the classics. Some of the participants saw the renderings as too marginal and experimental to be seriously considered. If, as linguistics-oriented traditionalists maintained, the Zukofskys' Catullus transfers only sound and not clear meanings, how can it be viewed as translation? For them, a fluent translation should be defended, a practice that does not deviate from the dominant practice of translating into standard usage, but rather creates a seamless language in the target text that produces in the reader's mind the illusion of reading the text in its original language. The provocative opening lines of Theo Hermans' position paper at the Vic Forum begin: "… First: why do we laugh at Zukofsky but gawk at Venuti?" From there Hermans proceeds to discuss the concept of abusive fidelity defended by Venuti, i.e. a form of translation – to use Philip Lewis' definition – which "values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own."

Some of the empirically oriented participants felt that one translation, the example of the Zukofskys' Catullus, was insufficient to construct theoretical concepts and translation "laws" in a research project. On the other hand were those, among them Venuti, who felt that the value of the translation – for research as well as training – lay precisely in the fact that it was a modernist experimental text that deviated from current language use and dominant translation practices: its very deviation created the occasion to theorise about the impact of modernism in translation and about the limitations of translation research and pedagogy.

Yet another debate led to the discussion of the Brazilian translator Haroldo de Campos' well-known cannibalistic metaphor for translation: his own translations, like the Zukofskys' Catallus, are far from "faithful" to the original, but rather exploit the transgressive potential afforded by the act of translating. Both debates voiced, implicitly or explicitly, the complexity of establishing what is a translation, what is an adaptation, what is simply another original inspired by a foreign work.

These and other debates during the Forum illustrate the current positioning of Translation Studies between theory based on linguistics and empirical phenomena, on the one hand, and a cultural-studies inspired theory, which uses empirical among other kinds of research, on the other. In view of this divergence, it is highly improbable that any one general theory of translation could be capacious enough, open enough to encompass all the variants and satisfy the different theoretical and methodological constituencies.

Hence, one might wonder: did any of the scholars change their views as a result of the confrontation at the Forum? The answer would have to be "probably not". Nevertheless, one of the remarkable things about the Forum was that scholars were willing to discuss what divided them and some even to seek areas where divergent approaches could be reconciled. At one point during the conference Theo Hermans defended translation as a cultural, and therefore historical phonemenon, embedded in values; he emphasised the uniqueness, the unrepeatability of translating events. Chesterman acknowledged, to a degree, their uniqueness but wished to look for generalities that were shared between the different translation events. His argument was: why reject that which can be shared?

One of the positive consequences of the Forum was that debates initiated there spilled over into a series of exchanges published in *Target*. Andrew Chesterman and Rosemary Arrojo published a joint paper reflecting areas of "shared ground" between the seemingly irreconcilable positions of empiricism and cultural studies. Their article, "Shared Ground in Translation Studies", lays out basic tenets about translation which can be accepted by both an empirical and a hermeneutic approach. These are presented in the form of a list of 30 theses grouped under three headings: "What is translation?", "Why is this (kind of) translation like this?" and "What consequences do translations have?", ending with a coda written by each author.

Their article was followed up by two contributions, the first by Kirsten Malmkjær, "Relative stability and stable relativity", a linguistics-oriented commentary which seems to sketch very little of "shared ground." "The essentialism vs non-essentialism dualism," Malmkjær writes, "went out of the epistemological window with Immanuel Kant." She proposes that "we stop assigning meanings to utterances, and give them to persons instead," ending her article with the statement: "I don't quite see how it is possible to discuss translations without adopting a non-destructivist view of linguistic relativity." Yet it remains true that the linguists and philosophers she cites are very different from the theorists and cultural historians cited by cultural-studies oriented scholars, who might question her insistence on "persons" as essentialist, too detached from the social and institutional situations in which utterances are exchanged.

The second response, by Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, "The suspended potential of culture research in TS," discusses the Chesterman-Arrojo article from a culture-oriented approach, viewing the issue of essentialism/non-essentialism as being anachronistic because "relativity, multiplicity and dependency of 'meaning' … [have] become a common creed in the humanities." Sela-Sheffy refers to Toury's study of translation norms, which stresses a target-oriented approach where:

> factors in the receiving cultural arena are the critical ones in determining the nature, status and tempo of the work of translation. Being basically a practice of importing, manipulating and transforming cultural goods and models, *the business of translation constitutes in itself an extremely interesting field of cultural production.* It is therefore time to take on the new directions recently proposed for TS (Toury 1995; Simeoni 1998; Venuti 1995; Hermans 1999) and give a better chance to the study of the peculiarities of this domain as a vital field of production in a certain socio-cultural space. This includes the way the field is organized, the profile of its agents, the distribution and availability of its repertoire, its sources of authorization, its relations with other fields of production, and more. (the author's emphasis)

Writing from the perspective of culture research, Sela-Sheffy points to the need to move away from the "cult of the Text" and proposes that the focus of Translation Studies be reversed: "Instead of viewing information about translations and translation institutions as marginal facts subjugated to explaining phenomena in translated texts, indications of translatorial decisions in end-products should be used as data for exploring cultural processes." One might wonder, however, about all the decisions made automatically by translators and hence possibly determined by their conscious, however that category might be defined. Sela-Sheffy's comments are more open than Malmkjær's, but they reveal that the work of theoretical synthesis has yet to begin, and that unanswered questions remain. If nothing else, the Vic Forum set a precedent by posing questions that are still being discussed.

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I have thought it helpful to describe briefly the state of Translation Studies today, using as a point of departure the debates that took place at the Vic Forum. Some of these discussions – on translation and interpreting pedagogy, critical debates in translation theory, the impact of new technologies in translation, among others – have created the occasion for this book and marked the direction it would take. This is a book which is addressed to both translator/interpreter trainers and trainees; it describes and discusses materials, approaches, textbooks, curricula. It is intended to facilitate the acquisition of a great deal of practical information, whether on skills and techniques or on the array of training programmes available and their methodologies. It presents, on the one hand, a selection of very practically-oriented pedagogical strategies related to specific areas of translation and interpreting and, on the other hand, a variety of theories around which the practice of translation and interpreting can develop. The essays reflect both the changes in pedagogical emphasis and the relatively new areas that are coming to the fore, such as Public Service interpreting, audiovisual translation and computer-assisted translation.

The five essays in the second section of this book, *Pedagogical Strategies*, put forward clear, practical presentations on how to train translators/interpreters in a primarily student-centred environment. These should be helpful for the translator, but also for the translator trainer who has rarely received any instruction in translation pedagogy. Both Christiane Nord and María González Davies, explicitly or implicitly, point to the need to train teachers of translation. As Nord states in her essay, "So far, there is no institutional training for translator trainers. Teachers of Mathematics or Philosophy are trained in their respective Faculties, Language Teachers are trained in Modern Language Departments or Faculties of Second Language Acquisition, but persons applying for a position as translator trainer in a Faculty of Translation and Interpreting need no particular formal qualification, and if they needed one, they would not know where to get it."

Other issues discussed during the Forum and reflected in the essays in this volume have arisen in large measure due to the rapidly changing world and the varied disciplines from which Translation Studies has emerged. One is the need to keep abreast of technological changes, changes which affect the social fabric of the present generation and which will determine to a large measure the conditions under which the translator and interpreter work. New technologies, especially the Internet, offer unparalleled access to information, data banks and terminology that will facilitate the translator's work, provided he or she acquires the know-how to rapidly retrieve and assimilate them. Richard Samson's essay on computer-assisted translation offers valuable, practical information and proposals, as well as a detailed appendix of sample projects that both translators and translator trainers should find useful. He advocates the immediate implementation of a methodological approach to training that goes beyond mere computer literacy. Students need to develop skills in specialised tasks which are cross-curricular and "involve a paradigm shift that affects the whole of the educational system."

What I believe, made clear from the majority of the essays in this volume, is that theory is considered a necessary tool for more effective training. Theory provides a structure from which to analyse translations, whether written or oral – i.e. interpreting –, describe them and apply empirical data to strategies. Translation theory is usually derived from translation practice, and knowledge of theoretical concepts can in turn motivate specific practical decisions. But perhaps one of the most valuable reasons for providing students with a theoretical framework is to give rise to reflection on what translators are doing and why. Whether one teaches theory that is derived from the hermeneutic tradition or from a more empirical tradition, or both, students need to be given an understanding of the process of translation and their responsibility for the product. Cultural studies emphasises the fact that culture is the creation of values and that translation is the re-creation of values in a different context. Empiricists argue that if one is familiar with data that have been empirically proven one can use the results to produce more effective translations.

Theoretical assumptions can only be arrived at through research. By providing empirical data on what can contribute to better translator competence, for example, research can help bridge the gap between theory and practice and challenge the often dismissive attitude toward theory that many translators have. In this sense, research can make a valuable contribution to the development of new methodological tools. To give but a few examples: Gideon Toury's notion of norms and polysystem theory have led to research in the area of audiovisual translation, such as that presented in work by Fotios Karamitroglou in the field of subtitling, especially related to the standardisation of subtitling in the European Union. In the case of interpreting, research that has been carried on for some time – involving for example, factors relating to stress or the importance of speaker visibility – should lead to better performance by interpreters. Mona Baker and others have written extensively on research based on the use of computerised corpora of translation texts and the relation to linguistic behaviour; some of the results have been applied to improving the quality of machine translation. From a cultural-studies point of view, research based on case studies that highlight such questions as the formation of national identities can provide a greater historical understanding of the social functioning of translation. Translations into Catalan, for example, not only promoted the language by contributing to its normativisation, but equally important, they created a reading public which had only been marginal before, and they were therefore used to advance the concept of Catalan identity. In general, any kind of research – whether it be theoretical, which is more the processing of ideas, or empirical, which is more the processing of hypotheses and data – will contribute to greater knowledge and awareness of the area under study and perhaps to a reassessment of that area.

Whatever one's theoretical point of departure, the primary aim of theory in translator/interpreter training should be to enable trainees to evaluate their decision-making, raise the level of consciousness about their practice and about the range of choices available to them and contribute to a growing awareness that translation is a linguistic, social and cultural practice that takes place in a particular moment in history. With greater knowledge and awareness, translators can make more responsible choices. Once they are familiar with norms, conventions, laws (laws in the descriptive, rather than prescriptive, sense of what translators tend to do in certain situations, such as the often-mentioned tendency to standardise the source language, flattening or softening the style) and socio-cultural conditions, translators can choose to apply these norms, laws, etc. or resist them. They can, except in certain cases – such as technical or legal translations where there is a fixed terminology – choose to transgress. But translator trainees need to be taught what the effects of their strategies are, and this is taught by examining theoretical assumptions.

The relevance of theory to the practice of translation is, precisely, the basis of the essay by Francesca Bartrina. Her essay proposes and discusses a syllabus for a general course on translation theory which would cover such areas as linguistics and translation, translation as communication, domestication and foreignisation, textuality and translation, cognition and translation. Other theoretical positions reflected in this volume are Chesterman's causality, Arrojo's non-essentialism and Christiane Nord's functionalism.

Andrew Chesterman's chapter examines causality, a central concept in any empirical science, and the roles that causes and effects play in translation studies. If translation is approached in the manner defended by Chesterman, it is with the always present assumption that one should propose hypotheses (he examines four: interpretive, descriptive, explanatory, predictive), which can subsequently be tested, and the results – when applied – will help to produce better translations. Without the ability to propose and then test hypotheses, translation theory has reached, in Chesterman's opinion, a stalemate. His abiding premise is that translator trainers want tested, corroborated hypotheses to show that certain conditions will contribute to achieving desired effects.

Rosemary Arrojo's chapter supports her argument against an exclusively essentialist approach to translation, an approach that assumes the presence of stable semantic essences in language, so that the translator seeks to substitute the "stable" meaning in a source text with an "idealised" equivalent – an ideally neutral reproduction – in the target text. She examines the work of certain scholars whom she associates with a predominantly essentialist theoretical foundation, viz. Mona Baker, Hatim and Mason and Paul Kussmaul, yet maintains that they share valuable arguments which could be incorporated into a wider approach. Hatim and Mason, for example, embrace notions from other disciplines such as stylistics, rhetoric, discourse analysis, ethnomethodology. Paul Kussmaul, on the other hand, approaches translation from a linguistics point of view, yet recognises that translation is not simply a mechanical activity but an interpretive one, an activity he associates with creativity, emphasising the fact that readers of a translation have expectations, norms and values which are influenced by culture. Arrojo points out that despite the apparent defence by Mona Baker, Hatim and Mason and Kussmaul of a conception of translation which would take into account the intimate relationship between language, culture and ideology, still their approaches remain very much committed to essentialism and lack any research in theoretical concepts beyond their own discipline.

After examining the essentialist approach to translation, Arrojo illustrates how translator training could focus on "the consequences of a conception of language and text which takes the conventionality of meaning to its last consequences … a perspective generally associated with post-modern, post-structuralist, or even post-colonial notions of language, which have as a common ground a disbelief in the possibility of any level of neutral, purely objective meaning."

Translation pedagogy, prompted by advances in foreign-language pedagogy, is moving more and more away from the traditional teacher-centred approach to a more communicative one. Whether we refer to this methodology as "student-centred", "empowering the student" or "deschooling" – to use Michael Cronin's term in this book – effective learning will no doubt prove that traditional methodologies based on the magisterial class, i.e. the teacher dictating/the student note-taking, are no longer adequate because they do not sufficiently involve the student in the learning process. María González Davies points out in her essay that research in language teaching has shown that learning is "enhanced when it is negotiated and experiential, with the students taking an active role in the process." In an interactive context, where the teacher is more guide and counsellor than ultimate authority, students participate to a much greater degree and tend to be more motivated as they become more responsible for their decisions, and ultimately for the final product, the translation. The opening words to Kiraly's *A Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education: Empowerment from Theory to Practice* record this pedagogical shift: "In recent years, it has become a commonplace in educational psychology that knowledge is constructed by learners, rather than being simply transmitted to them by their teachers. The implications of this viewpoint for the educational process are revolutionary, because it shifts the traditional focus of authority, responsibility and control in the educational process away from the teacher and towards the learner." As Samson points out in his essay, "Teachers are no longer the most important sources of knowledge for their students … [who] no longer have too little but too much information available and need to know how to manage the situation, how to find what they want … The skills they need are skills for managing change and learning on an on-going basis."

In the final essay of the book, Michael Cronin presents a critical assessment of contemporary approaches to translation pedagogy. Under the section "Translators as readers" Cronin touches on the history of reading, which is a "history of change", one that may well have long-term consequences for translation didactics. He refers to the assumption "made in much translation pedagogy … that while theories may change and disciplinary models come into or drop out of vogue, students are always and everywhere the same. In other words, the student is an invariant, transhistorical subject who is, to all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from his or her counterpart in the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth century." Cronin remarks on "the failure of translation pedagogy to take into account synchronic, geopolitical differences in the student body and teaching profession … [and] the further issue of the diachronic evolution of students over time, which directly impacts on what theories will be appropriate in pedagogic settings."

Translation, whether written or oral, clearly does not occupy a neutral space. It is much more than a mere cross-cultural exchange, and the task of training aspiring translators/interpreters requires new directions, as well as revisions of traditional notions concerning their roles. From an empirical point of view, students need to be more aware of the tools they have at their disposal, such as how to gather, process and analyse information; they will of course assess the information differently according to the bent of their theoretical assumptions. Another issue is the explicit element of power and ideology that arises from the irrefutable fact that it is the client who pays for the translation; students need to acknowledge this and recognise that their translation choices will – may – be affected. Likewise, students are often not aware of the potential influence translations and translators can have in shaping cultures, forming national identities, chronicling ideological shifts. They need to recognise their contribution to these social effects of translations and accept their responsibility for what may well have political consequences.

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