HAL
open science

Contribution of translator network mailing lists to the teaching of translation theory

Freddie Plassard

To cite this version:

Freddie Plassard. Contribution of translator network mailing lists to the teaching of translation theory. Zybatow, Lew, Petrova, Alena, Ustaszewski, Michael. Translationswissenschaft interdisziplinär: Fragen der Theorie und der Didaktik, 15, Peter Lang, pp.385-392, 2012, Forum Translationswissenschaft, 978-3-631-63508-7. hal-01639196

HAL Id: hal-01639196

https://hal.science/hal-01639196v1

Submitted on 22 Dec 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

CONTRIBUTION OF TRANSLATOR NETWORK MAILING LISTS TO THE TEACHING OF TRANSLATION THEORY

Freddie Plassard, Paris (France)

In a Translation Studies course delivered at ESIT, a student asked me about the overall scope of TS. If I were to translate his words into my own language, I would refer to how to get into or join TS, as one joins a club for instance, or how to find the right gateway to TS. I would also refer to the difficulty of having an overview of the discipline, of grasping its structure, whatever the encompassing overviews that may exist, while noting the lack of any unified or homogeneous terminology use, as has been mentioned over and over by various authors and schools (Gambier / Doorslaer 2009). I would meanwhile observe that many articles published on TS to date rely for their major part on arguments or even methodologies borrowed from disciplines other than TS. I will nevertheless try to provide a few general comments on what TS is supposed to be and on its audience.

1. Teaching TS

TS can be viewed both as a discipline with fuzzy boundaries and a research field. As a discipline, TS is taught and two kinds of audiences can be distinguished – would-be practitioners, for whom TS largely amounts to translation theory and is part of a practice-oriented curriculum and would-be academics, for whom „learning" TS means being trained to perform research. I will first briefly deal with the latter.

1.1. TS as a research field to be explored

Whole curricula have been specifically designed for TS research training, with the aim of providing a procedural and metacognitive knowledge in a field to be explored. What is at stake here is actually knowing „how to", rather than „knowing what". We should nonetheless bear in mind that in order to be able to formulate a so-called „research question", it might be necessary to have a fairly good overview of a discipline, its structure and sub-domains, not to mention the major issues of all kinds at stake in the domain. Would academics in economics or medicine for instance admit a student to a PhD course if they knew that he / she had no precise idea of what their field consists in? How would students define a research subject without being aware of the boundaries of their discipline? Where do research questions arise? From practice, as is often said and at the

same time denied in TS or from the knowledge of practice and its evolution? I will leave the question open and move on to consider TS as a discipline and translation theory in particular.

1.2. TS as a discipline to be taught

Little, if anything has ever been said or written about teaching translation theory aimed at practitioners, whereas much has been written about the interrelation between theory and practice, a matter which somehow can be traced back to Aristotle. Historical reasons may account for the way translation theory, viewed as „a set of principles used to explain a class of phenomena" (Lederer 2007, 16), was taught to would-be practitioners in the 1970s and 1980s, at a time when theories, whether interpretive, functionalist or else, stressed the importance of practitioners' reflections and the description of practice. Teaching TS at that time mainly amounted to laying aside the linguistic perspective on translation, setting the basic principles of translation and interpreting and designing a reference framework for early research in TS, whatever its limits.

The main arguments put forward in favour of teaching translation theory are manifold. According to Pezza Cintrao (2010, 168), translation theory is a form of declarative knowledge, which in turn leads her to question the interrelation between declarative and procedural knowledge. She concludes that translation theory is an aid to detecting and solving translation problems insofar as it is an explicit presentation of translation concepts and meta-reflection. The benefits of teaching translation theory usually put forward vis-à-vis students is that it makes them aware of multiple aspects and problems of translation (Snell-Hornby/Kadric 1995, 33). To a given extent, theory amounts to describing and explaining practice in all its dimensions and thus provides an understanding of translation and its problems (Lederer 2007, 17). Theory also makes it easier for students to become proficient in their activity. Translation theory may also form part of vocational training, and in this respect, may help students to make rational decisions that they are in a position to justify if required to do so (Snell-Hornby & Kadric 1995, 34). Pezza Cintrao assumes furthermore that theory helps to transform simplistic mental schemes about translation into more complex ones, providing flexibility in dealing with translation problems. Teachers are not forgotten in the process, insofar as teaching translation theory would provide them with arguments to guide their translation teaching practice and make it more systematic (id.). Translation criticism and translation comparison is also likely to benefit from the process since translation theory provides academics and students with conceptual tools to enable them to make better translation

evaluation. Yet the way translation theory could be taught has usually not been dealt with. Pezza Cintrao (2010, 178-179) suggests that

> explicit presentation of concepts and principles in the initial stages of learning can work as a "magnifying glass", lending visibility to the fundamental mechanisms of translation, such as, for instance, the different levels of equivalence or correspondence that can be given precedence in different tasks, in relation to the textual type, audience and intended effects.

1.3. Today's situation

The issue of the advantages of teaching theory in translation training courses goes on (Shlesinger 2009) and the debate becomes even more acute in the context of new technologies which in given areas make the divide between theory and practice even wider than it may have been before. The fact that some students who have been trained to use translation memories feel helpless when required to translate a text from scratch gives an indication of the problem. The question is how to bridge the gap, how to teach translation theory: through practice, by reading texts, through *ex catedra* teaching? These questions are but randomly addressed and require a strenuous effort of synthesis from students. Bearing in mind the number of publications on TS which has grown dramatically in the last decades, what are the benchmarks that enable one to make one's way in TS, either as a teacher or a student? Van Doorslaer (2009) suggests that conceptual mapping of TS with keywords and key notions might be a solution. Let me now turn to the way translation theory is actually taught.

2. How is Translation theory taught?

What should a TS academic start with when teaching TS, or at least translation theory? The question remains open. Adopting a top-down method would consist in providing an overview of the whole field based on its constitutive parts, whereas a bottom-up method would entail exploring every part before having an idea of the field as a whole. What does TS teaching methods aim at? Teachers seem to agree on the necessity of reading major canonical texts, having a few benchmarks of translation history, knowing the basic principles of major theories, being familiar with the key notions of TS, having at least a rough idea of current debates and being able to map the major lines or outlines of the discipline.

James Holmes' structure of TS is still often referred to, whatever comments and limits may have been expressed here and there about it. Could it be replaced by other and more up-to-date material such as that suggested and commented upon by Van Doorslaer (2009)? Any consensus on what TS encompasses has yet to be

found. Let us nonetheless review the tools available to teach TS. Even if an exhaustive review is by no means the aim of this paper, there exist TS manuals (Munday 2008), overviews of contemporary TS (Gentzler 1993; Pym 2009), TS encyclopedias (Baker & Saldanha, 2008; Snell-Hornby et al. 1998), anthologies of major TS texts throughout history (Venuti & Baker, 2000), historical overviews of TS (Ballard 1992; Larose 1989; Stolze 1994; Snell-Hornby 2006), reflections on the epistemology of the discipline, its interdisciplinarity and boundaries, TS bibliographies, conference proceedings aiming explicitly or implicitly at delivering the state of the art. These publications are an opportunity to draw an outline of the discipline while contributing a better understanding and description of the translation process and competence.

2.1. What do mailing lists contribute to the teaching of translation theory?

I have dealt with translation mailing lists in previous articles, i.e. conversational exchanges carried out by email on translation questions, making translation a collaborative practice. I just wish to point out, as a hypothesis, that the material provided by these lists could serve as a basis for teaching TS in a bottom-up approach. In this respect, I will now take two very casual examples, i.e. not entailing any specialised knowledge other than the „basic" translation skill.

The first example (see Appendix 1) deals with the advertisement for a drug to improve kidney function of patients after a transplant. The text is allusive and elliptic and an inference is meant to be drawn between the (verbal) text and the picture (which does not appear in the message sent but is described). The example may serve as a basis for analysis of the advertisement, where meaning is conveyed by both verbal and iconic material, in this case a paraglider. The ad to be translated from German into French aims to show the advantages of the drug, at a time when there has been a major scandal in France relating to various drugs (Mediator) and when any drug has become suspect. The wording of the message needs therefore to take into account the purpose of the message and the fact that it is part of a communication situation, however virtual it may be at this stage, making the example a case for a functionalist approach to translation (Nord 1997, 27).

The example essentially boils down to an issue of creativity: the (verbal) context or cotext is given by way of a description of the whole text; answers are given on an iterative and heuristic basis: every answer brings a new element and little by little, from one answer to another, a better understanding of the problem is given and solutions are provided. Where creativity is at stake, rewording does not necessarily proceed in a rational way, even if the analysis of the picture is taken into account more by associating ideas, interrelating them, by intuition and imagina-

tion, or by inverting the word order changing a positive clause into a negative one and so on. Meanwhile, are strategies actually implemented, and if so, are they deliberately and knowingly implemented? Are they not spontaneous?
The second example (see Appendix 2) deals with the translation of the French expression, „Mixité homme / femme" and sets a terminology question. It also relates to the change in the use of language. The newly-coined expression may not be understood at once. In order to translate it, should any existing terminology be used, assuming it could be identified and found, or should a new expression be coined under the circumstances described by the author of the question? Ample „verbal context" or cotext in the source language is provided. Answers A1 to A3 are various answers to the question, all relying on a spontaneous wording, A4 questions the term, „mixité" itself, A6 refers to what is usually said in such circumstances (common and current use of the language) and indicates a quick search in Google. A10 is an explanation of the connotation conveyed by the French word, A11 is a synthesis of all answers provided and a critical analysis (and rejection) of almost all of them and the adoption of one of the most simple and explicit altogether.

3. *Conclusions*

What do such series of questions and answers bring to the teaching of translation theory? Exchanges on mailing lists make it possible to observe daily practice of translation and the questions arising in this context and comply with the aim of TS as set by Seleskovitch (1991), i.e. describing, explaining or devising everything relating to translation, emerging from practice and source of question, whether from a theoretical point of view or in daily practice. The examples illustrate the debates arising from one single question, which in turn could be compared to what J.-R. Ladmiral (1979, 116-17) says about the input of theory into practice, insofar as they help to define and formulate translation difficulties and even clarify or categorise them whilst showing how translation decisions are made. Exchanges are carried out on a *conversational* basis involving several translators. It is therefore no longer necessary to make assumptions about what is going on in translators' minds or resort to cumbersome think-aloud protocols. Solutions to translation problems are found in a dialogue, as was the case in Plato's dialogues. The process is iterative: every answer brings a new element, it is heuristic, insofar as no pre-given method, technique or strategy is defined, it involves a research procedure defined on an ad hoc basis and conveys an implicit definition of translation as both a problem-solving matter by showing what techniques or strategies are used to solve a problem and as a negotiation: translation

evolves from deliberation and exchanging points of view, a form of knowledge often delivered in translation training, however „old-fashioned" it may seem.

References

Baker, M. / Saldanha G. (2008): *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translations Studies.* London / New-York
Ballard, M. (1992): *De Cicéron à Benjamin.* Lille
Gambier, Y. / van Doorslaer, L. (eds.) (2009): *The metalanguage of translation.* Amsterdam / Philadelphia, 27-43
Gentzler, E. (1993): *Contemporary translation theories.* London / New York
Ladmiral J.-R. (1979): *Traduire, théorèmes pour la traduction*, Paris
Larose, R. (1989): *Théories contemporaines de la traduction.* Québec
Lederer, M. (2007): Can theory help translator and interpreter trainers and trainees? In: *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* 1/1, 15-35
Munday, J. (2008): *Introducing Translations Studies, theories and applications.* London / New York
Nord, C. (1997): *Translating as a purposeful activity.* Manchester
Pezza Cintrao, H. (2010): Magnifying glasses modifying maps- a role for translation theory in introductory courses. In: Gile, D. / Hansen, G. / Pokorn, N. (eds.): *Why translation Studies matters.* Amsterdam / Philadelphia, 167-181
Pym A. (2009): *Exploring translation theories.* London / New York
Seleskovitch, D. (1991): Traductologie, *Traduire* 150, 5-14
Shlesinger, M. (2009): Crossing the divide: What researchers and practitioners can learn from one another. In: *T&I, The International Journal for Translation and Interpreting Research*, I-1, 1-16
Snell-Hornby, M. (2006): *The turns of Translation Studies.* Amsterdam, Philadelphia
Snell-Hornby, M. / Kadric, M. (1995): *Grundfragen der Übersetzungswissenschaft. Wiener Vorlesungen von K. Reiß*. Wien
Snell-Hornby, M. / Hönig, H. G. / Kussmaul, P. / Schmitt, P. A. (1998): *Handbuch Translation.* Tübingen
Stolze R. (1994): *Übersetzungstheorien.* Tübingen
Van Doorslaer, L. (2009): Risking conceptual maps: Mapping as a keywords-related tool underlying the online Translation Studies bibliography. In: Gambier, Y. / van Doorslaer, L. (eds.) (2009): *The metalanguage of translation.* Amsterdam / Phildelphia, 27-43
Venuti, M. / Baker, M. (2000): *The Translations Studies reader.* London / New York

Appendix 1 – Example 1 : Advertisement – Verbindet
Question: Comment traduiriez-vous « Produit X schützt und verbindet » ? Le problème que j'ai est pour traduire « verbindet ». Le contexte: il s'agit d'un médicament utilisé dans la prévention de rejet d'un greffon chez les patients ayant eu une greffe du rein. Il y a également une illustration accompagnant ce slogan publicitaire : une personne en parachute. Comment redonner en français à la fois l'idée de lien entre le greffon et l'organe du patient et le lien entre le parachute et la personne via les cordes du parachute. J'ai bien

pensé à « relier » ou « faire le lien » mais cela ne me satisfait pas du tout. Auriez-vous des idées ? Evidemment c'est assez urgent: je dois rendre la traduction demain soir. Un grand merci d'avance aux réseauistes qui voudront bien se pencher sur cette question.
Answer 1: J'extrapolerais sur l'idée de verbinden pour partir sur une termino des « aériens », moi malheureusement je n'ai (n'avais) que celle des « voiliers », pour trouver comment s'appellent justement ces liens et autres cordes, bouts, etc. La seule pauvre chose qui me vient à l'esprit ce soir, c'est « il ne va pas vous lâcher » (dans le genre « ne lâchez rien »). Bof. Bonne chance et bonne mongolfière (euh pardon, parachute) : ah tiens il y a une idée là, entre parachute (empêche de tomber) et l'autre qui aide à partir vers le haut ?
A2 (to A1): Merci bien pour ces premières idées. En y regardant de plus près, je me suis rendue compte que finalement ce n'était pas un parachute mais un parapente. D'après mes recherches ces cordes sont appelées « suspentes », du coup je me suis branchée sur l'idée de suspension. Je pourrais peut-être opter pour « Produit X : protection et suspension assurées ». Je reste ouverte à toute autre suggestion, si vous avez des idées, n'hésitez pas à me les communiquer. La nuit portant conseil, je vais me repencher sur le problème demain.
A3: Je ne vois pas quel pourrait être le rapport entre la greffe et ce « verbindet », et je ne comprends pas l'allusion au parapente. Une bouteille d'eau aurait plus de sens, car la personne greffée peut enfin à nouveau boire à volonté. Et si tu te libérais des mots de ce slogan? Le verbe *préserver* me semblerait plus adapté dans ce contexte.
A4: Bonsoir, Pourquoi pas « ... protège et soutient » ?
A5: Bonjour ! Pourquoi pas « X ne vous laisse pas tomber », qui irait bien avec le parapente ? Évidemment, on s'éloigne de « verbindet », mais je pense que dans ce cas il faut le faire.
A6: Bonjour, Dans le même ordre d'idées : « protège sans larguer » (familier, je le reconnais) « protège sans lâcher de lest ».
A7: Hello, et pourquoi prendre à « l'envers » ? – « sans rejeter »
A8: Je reviens sur ma question de la semaine dernière au sujet de la traduction de „Zusammen. Weltweit. Erfolgreich. « Vos suggestions étaient notamment »
1. La réussite. Ensemble. Partout
2. Réussir ensemble pour la planète
3. Ensemble vers un succès planétaire. Le client a finalement opté pour la formule « Une réussite collective mondiale ». Je vous laisse apprécier et vous souhaite à tous une bonne journée,

Appendix 2 – Example 2 : Mixité homme / femme
Question: zu Hilf, liebe Réseauisten! Ein Aufruf, Projekte einzureichen, die die Bewohner eines Stadtteils einander näher bringen sollen, um das soziale Geflecht zu verbessern. Im Antrag für eine finanz. Unterstützung zur Durchführung solcher Projekte soll die Zielgruppe beschrieben werden:
(1) quantitativ: die Anzahl der Personen

(2) qualitativ: die Merkmale der ins Auge gefassten Zielgruppe (Altersgruppen, sozioprofessionelle Kategorien, **mixité homme / femme**, Beteiligung am Projekt und Motivierung zur Teilnahme)
Ich ergänze heute eine frühere Üb. und habe deshalb nicht den ganzen Text auf FR vorliegen. Und diese mixité war mir entgangen – und jetzt ist es eilig... Bisher habe ich *Mischung Männer / Frauen*, aber da gibt es doch bestimmt etwas besseres. Etwas mit *Gender* scheint mir allerdings nicht passend. Vielen Dank für eure Vorschläge! Gruss.
A1: Liebe S., würde „Männer und Frauen“ nicht reichen?
A2 :Vielleicht ganz einfach „Männer und Frauen gemeinsam“?
A3 : Gleich großer Anteil (oder: gleich große Beteiligung) Männer / Frauen? Oder: Ausgewogene Beteiligung Männer / Frauen?
A4 : „Mixité“ heißt nicht unbedingt „gleich großer Anteil“…
A5 : Tout à fait d'accord avec B.
A6 : man spricht ja allenthalben von der „Frauenquote“. „Quote Männer-Frauen“ – alternative Schreibweisen „Quote Männer: Frauen“ oder „Quote Männer / Frauen“ – findet man aber auch. Auch nur „Frauenanteil“ oder „Männeranteil“ wäre denkbar, je nach dem Blickwinkel des Interesses. Oder „Frauen- / Männeranteil“. Bei *google* fand ich diverse Male „Verteilung Männer / Frauen“ in Statistiken. Vielleicht passt das hier am besten? S.
A7 : Une suggestion: „Anteil Männer / Frauen“.
A8 : Was hältst Du von “Geschlechterverteilung“?
A9 : A (R8) je le comprends comme nombre de femmes par rapport au nombre d'hommes ou vice-versa.
A 10 : je trouve dans mixité une notion aussi de « non-discrimination entre hommes et femmes », c'est peut-être ancien (voire !!! toujours actuel peut-être)
A11 : Vielen Dank an alle, die mitgedacht haben!
(2) qualitativ: die Merkmale der ins Auge gefassten Zielgruppe > (Altersgruppen, sozioprofessionelle Kategorien, **mixité homme / femme**, > Beteiligung am Projekt und Motivierung zur Teilnahme)
Da es im ganzen Text *überhaupt nicht um die Forderung nach mehr Frauen in sonst den Männern vorbehaltenen Kreisen* geht, wie Verwaltungsräte, passte *Frauenquote* nicht. Es geht in dem Text *auch nicht um Diskriminierung bzw. deren Bekämpfung*. Auch um *gleich großen Anteil (oder: gleich große Beteiligung) Männer / Frauen oder ausgewogene Beteiligung Männer / Frauen ging es nicht.
Geschlechterverteilung klingt für mich nach Statistik. Nur *Männer und Frauen* fand ich hier nicht klar. Ebenso fand ich hier *Männer und Frauen gemeinsam* nicht passend. Sondern ich verstand den Begriff hier als « nombre de femmes par rapport au nombre d'hommes ou vice-versa ». Und deshalb habe ich geschrieben: *Anteil Männer / Frauen* – danke, Juliette :-) Ein vielschichtiger Begriff, diese mixité! Gruss.