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Trekking further into context: exploring the relation between translators'/interpreters' practices and their discourses

Panel: Veerle Duflou, (University College Ghent, Belgium); Fernando Ferreira Alves (Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal); Peter Flynn - moderator (Lessius University College, Antwerp, Belgium); Heidi Salaets, Lessius University College, Antwerp, Belgium).

Research within Translation Studies has become increasingly context oriented. Though norm theory is eminently sociological in its theoretical underpinnings (Pym in Pym, Shlesinger & Jettmarová, 2006: 3), researchers were slow to move beyond textual sources (Toury, 1995:65) in search of evidence of normative translational behaviour, text being understood here as also including oral output in interpreting. The need for a different form of analysis first arose in the field of community interpreting research, but context oriented approaches have also proved fruitful for the study of other forms of translational or interpreting activity. Theoretically, explanatory links have been established between text/utterance on the one hand and context (viz. translation and norms (Chesterman 1993, Toury 1995,), regimes (Pym 1998), habitus (Gouanvic 2005, Sela-Sheffy 2005, Simeoni 1998) and sociology (Gouanvic 1997, Wolf 2006, Wolf & Fukari 2007, inter alia.) on the other hand. Empirical studies have drawn on sources from libraries and archives and more recently on on-line surveys (Katan, Pöchhacker & Zwischenberger, 2009) 9 and (ethnographic) fieldwork (Inghilleri 2003, 2005, Angelleli 2004, Koskinen 2008, among many others) in the search for patterns in / explanations for translational practices. The work of all of the scholars mentioned so far demonstrate the interdisciplinary nature of Translation Studies in the way they draw on approaches, research methodologies and assumptions from outside Translation Studies proper. This in turn has raised debate about how much of any given discipline a researcher should be acquainted with, next to translation studies, in order to arrive at productive results in translation research (see, for example, Pym's debate on the sociology of translation in Pym, Shlesinger & Jettmarová, 2006: 4-6). Such interdisciplinary exchanges and debates are essential, if we wish to acquire a fuller picture of translating or interpreting as situated practices and hence further develop and fine-tune our models for describing and analysing translation not just as a language phenomenon alone but also as a social phenomenon. The panel we propose plans to address more specifically the role of stances and positionings found in translators' and interpreters' discourses within the whole of translation/interpreting practices. The fundamental question underlying this is: how are we to understand this relation? We believe that surveys, participant observation and in-depth interviews can allow us to gain insight into and outline (embodied) stances and positionings with regard to translational and interpreting activities and thereby provide an essential complement to the information a comparative analysis of data from translational and interpretive exchanges can provide us information on translational strategies and tactics. Without wishing to deny the importance of studying translations as such, we would like to focus in the main on the translatorial side of the proposition.

We argue that this relation between the translational and the translatorial is not of a falsifiable nature to the extent that practices may be shown to contradict positionings and vice versa.

Translation theory and professional practice: A global survey of the Great Divide; Franz Pöchhacker, University of Vienna, Conference
Interpreting: Surveying the profession; Cornelia Zwischenberger, University of Vienna, Web-based surveying among conference interpreters: Methodology and application. All three papers were delivered during “Profession, identity and status: translators and interpreters as an occupational group” a research workshop held by the Israeli Science Foundation in Tel Aviv March 15-19 2009
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We would also argue against considering translatorial discourse merely as half-remembered ad-hoc rationalisations of practice or expressions of semi-conscious strategies. Rather we would like to suggest that the two avenues of conceptualisation (translational and translatorial and the subsequent research issuing from them), though useful in terms of method and approach to forms of data, prevent us from conceiving of translation or interpreting as a holistic event, not just the sum of its scholarly parts (see Hanks 1996:14 on practice). We argue that it is from within this holistic framework that we can best understand the relation between translatorial discourse and translational practice and hence translating or interpreting.

Each of the speakers in the panel will address the main topic from the perspective of his/her research interests and methods, with a view to shedding light on basic aspects of the holistic framework mentioned above. In this regard, each will highlight the difficulties encountered and the benefits gained from conducting a particular line of research. Following each speaker’s outline, an attempt will be made to combine the various insights and make suggestions for a further explicitation of the relation between translational practices and translatorial discourse. Our basic stance here is that understanding translation/interpreting phenomena and more specifically the relation between text and context will always involve an interdisciplinary engagement with a variety of research methodologies along with their basic assumptions regarding meaning making. Translation is understood as being set within the scope of the so-called technical-intellectual labour, developed in a complex network system (Strauss, 1987) within a specific “community of practice” (Wenger, 1999) including both people and institutions involved in the production of “immaterial and incorporeal goods” (Heilbron and Sapiro, 2007). Given the complex nature of translation and interpreting as a holistic socio-cultural event involving language(s), no single discipline can offer a complete picture.

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