



A Translator's Wanderings in TranslationStudiesWorld

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Article abstract

This semi-autobiographical article reflects on the discipline known as Translation Studies from the point of view of the author, who was a full-time Canadian government translator from 1974 to 2014, but also taught and wrote about translation. The narrative begins with the emergence of Translation Studies in Canada and in Europe and continues through the present neoliberal era, with reflection on a variety of topics including the English name of the discipline, the lack of definition of an object of study, the original role of the journal *Meta*, and the notion of translation as applied linguistics. The last section considers two fictive scenarios in which Translation Studies does not emerge, and translation is studied, right from the start, in ways much more closely linked to the translation profession, with a focus on translators rather than translations, and therefore on translational production rather than the analysis of completed translations.

A Translator's Wanderings in Translation Studies World

Brian Mossop, Certified Translator

Abstract

This semi-autobiographical article reflects on the discipline known as Translation Studies from the point of view of the author, who was a full-time Canadian government translator from 1974 to 2014, but also taught and wrote about translation. The narrative begins with the emergence of Translation Studies in Canada and in Europe and continues through the present neoliberal era, with reflection on a variety of topics including the English name of the discipline, the lack of definition of an object of study, the original role of the journal *Meta*, and the notion of translation as applied linguistics. The last section considers two fictive scenarios in which Translation Studies does not emerge, and translation is studied, right from the start, in ways much more closely linked to the translation profession, with a focus on translators rather than translations, and therefore on translational production rather than the analysis of completed translations.

Keywords: Translation Studies, alternate history, applied linguistics, neoliberalism, professional translators

Résumé

Cet article en partie autobiographique présente une réflexion sur la traductologie du point de vue de l'auteur qui était traducteur à temps plein au Bureau de la traduction du gouvernement du Canada de 1974 à 2014, mais qui, en même temps enseignait la traduction et publiait les fruits de ses recherches en traductologie. Le récit commence avec l'émergence de la discipline au Canada et en Europe et prend fin en notre époque néolibérale. Parmi les sujets de réflexion sont le nom anglais de la discipline, l'absence de définition claire de son objet d'étude, la fonction initiale de la revue *Meta* et le lien entre traduction et linguistique appliquée. En conclusion, l'auteur considère deux scénarios fictifs dans lesquels la traductologie ne se manifeste pas et les recherches sur la traduction se font, dès les années 1970, en lien étroit avec la profession; elles sont centrées sur les traducteurs plutôt que sur les traductions et sur la production traductive plutôt que sur l'analyse de traductions déjà faites.

Mots-clés : traductologie, uchronie, linguistique appliquée, néo-libéralisme, traducteurs professionnels

Translation Studies is not just about translations (their causes, processes, products and effects). It is also about translators (their minds, their workplaces, their motivations), as was pointed out a decade ago by Andrew Chesterman in “The Name and Nature of Translator Studies” (2009). What follows are the reflections of one translator about his wanderings in the world of Translation Studies.

Some people who make their living by translation teaching and research continue to practice translation as a sideline, and many have been full-time practitioners in the past (Pym and Torres-Simón, 2016). As for those who make their living by translating, my impression is that while a few write on practical matters for professional publications, hardly any conduct research or write theoretical articles (see for example the writings posted at TranslationDirectory.com). I do not think this is primarily because they believe reflection on their practice is pointless, or they have bad memories of theory courses at translation school, or they lack time. It’s simply a matter of different interests. How many musicians write for musicology journals? How many chefs write about food? That said, until I retired from full-time professional translation in 2014, I was one daily practitioner who did write about translation for academic publications as a sideline. In the 1980s, I was doing so at a time when what we now call Translation Studies (TS) was just coming into being in parts of Europe, Canada and Israel, before the field globalized at the end of the century.

James Holmes, a Dutch-English poetry translator, famously mapped his proposed new discipline way back in 1972.¹ It could also be mapped in terms of the various kinds of professional practice to which teaching and research may relate: literary translation publishing, subtitling, simultaneous conference interpreting, journalistic trans-editing, and so on. My own teaching and writing grew for the most part out of my work in non-literary written translation in a bilingual government setting.

There is a body of historical research that deals with the translation profession in the 20th century (for Canada, see for example Delisle and Otis, 2016), the lives of famous translators, and the activities of “schools” of translators at various points in history, not to

1. Holmes is quoted as saying: “It has been my extensive experience as a translator that has made it possible for me to contribute the occasional sensible word to translation studies” (1988 [1972], p. 2).

mention numerous descriptions of successive theories of translation from ancient times to the present. However, what follows will not be an exercise in historiography. I shall simply set out how things have looked over the past half century from my own vantage point in Canada at the intersection of government translation work and translation teaching and research: part autobiography, part reflection on the entity known as Translation Studies.

Before TS

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Toronto in the second half of the 1960s, studying modern languages, I came upon John Catford's recently published *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* and I read some of Eugene Nida's writings on linguistics (but not on translation). I also took a course on the comparative stylistics of English and French using Jean-Paul Vinay² and Jean Darbelnet's now famous 1958 book, as well as a course in linguistics from translation theorist Georges Mounin in Aix-en-Provence during my "third year abroad" in 1967-1968, though I do not recall him mentioning translation.

In those years, I had no particular interest in translation as either an occupation or an object of study. Unlike in French-speaking Canada, where translation had long been a common occupation, in English-speaking Canada it was not an occupation that came readily to mind. I became a translator purely by chance. One day in 1972, when I was a graduate student of linguistics researching the syntax of one of the indigenous languages, I happened to see a newspaper ad placed by the Canadian federal government as part of its recruiting drive for translators in the aftermath of the passage in 1969 of the *Official Languages Act*. I applied, wrote the examination, was interviewed, and in June 1974, I became a full-time salaried French-to-English translator in the government's Translation Bureau in Toronto. I found that I liked it so much that I stayed for the next 40 years! I was enjoying the act of translating and also doing some good: making it possible for Francophone civil servants to write documents in their own language yet still have their thinking conveyed to their Anglophone colleagues and other Canadians who could not read French.

2. I first encountered Vinay on television when I was a child in the 1950s. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's English-language network had a weekly program called "Speaking French", with Vinay as the teacher.

TS emerges in Canada

In 1977, I attended the 8th congress of the *Fédération internationale des traducteurs* in Montreal, where I heard James Holmes speak about translation theory (Holmes, 1988 [1977]). The following year, I began to turn myself into a practitioner-theorist by presenting a one-day workshop on “linguistics and translation” for members of the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO).

In Canada, both professional translators’ associations like ATIO and Translation Studies emerged principally among Francophones in Quebec and in the capital city Ottawa. As an English-Canadian from Toronto, my contact with Francophone professionals was partly through ATIO but mainly through my employer (when I joined the Translation Bureau’s Toronto unit in 1974, only 4 of the approximately 20 employees were Anglophones³). My contact with the emerging study of translation began in 1980, when I was asked to teach revision to students working toward a bachelor’s degree in translation at York University’s new School of Translation in Toronto. I had been a reviser at the Translation Bureau for four years at that point, and I now had to formulate for students some principles drawn from my work. The School of Translation, located at York’s bilingual Glendon College, also put me in touch with others interested in writing about and teaching translation. I have continued to teach one three-month course a year at the School ever since, on a variety of topics, including practice in specialized translation and theory of translation.

Also in the early 1980s, I wrote my first two articles. One of them, “A Procedure for Self-revision”, was a purely practical piece that appeared in a Translation Bureau publication (Mossop, 1982). The other article appeared in the journal *Meta* (Mossop, 1983). *Meta’s* history is of considerable interest. From 1955 to 1966, the journal now titled *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Translators’ Journal* was simply called the *Journal des traducteurs/Translators’ Journal*. It was initially published by the Association canadienne des traducteurs diplômés/Canadian Association of Certificated Translators. In 1957 it moved to the linguistics department of the Université de Montréal with Jean-Paul Vinay as editor, though even then it

3. To this day, some 85% of the Bureau’s translators work from English to French since only a small portion of the demand is in the other direction or involves non-official languages.

was published with the assistance of the Institut de traduction, a training organization affiliated with the university. Until 1992, it was published with the help of a variety of professional associations, included the Société des traducteurs du Québec (STQ) and ATIO. *Meta* mostly published articles about the profession and about translation pedagogy until TS made its appearance in the 1980s. As late as the 20th anniversary issue in 1975, the editor proclaimed that the journal had always sought to be the reflection of *la vie des traducteurs*—a professional more than a scholarly journal. At my Translation Bureau office, the librarian circulated every issue of the journal when it arrived, so that it was brought to the attention of each translator. In Quebec, the French-language magazine *Circuit*, founded in 1983 by the STQ, became the main forum for writing about the profession, while *Meta* gradually turned into a scholarly publication.

In view of this history, my 1983 article's title is in retrospect revealing: "The Translator as Rapporteur: A Concept for Training and Self-Improvement". The article was my first stab at theory (I put forward the idea that from the translator's point of view, translating is quoting, that is, an act of reported discourse) but I couched my ideas in terms of practicalities (training and professional development). Translating as quoting, a theme I continued to develop in later articles (Mossop, 1987, 1998, 2009, 2010), reflected my primary interest in translating as a special kind of language production. That interest was partly rooted in my undergraduate and graduate studies in linguistics, but mainly I think in the fact that I continued to spend seven hours a day, five days a week producing English wordings after reading chunks of French texts. In the early days of what we now call TS, "translation as language" was one of the two centerpieces of thought (alongside "translation as literature"). While the field subsequently took a bewildering number of "turns", I myself never turned away from translation as a special kind of reading and writing. I even organized a panel "Back to Translation as Language" for the 2004 conference of the European Society for Translation Studies (Mossop, 2005).

In those years, all my teaching and writing was informed by my work as a translator. The text I used for my 1983 *Meta* article was a passage from an article in the field of ornithology which I had translated at work. Students in my revision course were given

unrevised translations which I brought from work. I would often pause as I translated or revised to note down an interesting passage of French-to-English translation or a thought about revision which I could use in my writing or my course. My relationship to the then new field of Translation Studies was in my mind an extension of my profession. I never thought of myself as a professor of translation, and still do not to this day, though I do see myself as a “thinker about translation”. When people ask me what I do, I say that I’m a translator (or, these days, a retired translator).

In 1987, I became one of the founding members of the Canadian Association for Translation Studies/Association canadienne de traductologie (CATS/ACT).⁴ Canada was the first country in the world with a formal association that gave organizational expression to the sense of community that had been taking shape among translation researchers. In 1988, I published “Translating Institutions: A Missing Factor in Translation Theory” in the second issue of the journal you are now reading, *TTR*, which had just become the official organ of CATS/ACT. The main example I used of a translating institution was my employer, the Translation Bureau.

Europe and the Turn to Reading in the 1980s

While there had long been an international community of translators, it was not until the 1980s that an international community of translation researchers, independent of the translators and of established disciplines, took shape in parts of Europe, and I became involved in it. In 1986, I received in the mail a copy of issue 1 of the journal *TextConText*, published in Heidelberg, Germany. I was astonished to find that it contained a 10-page review of my *Meta* article! Accompanying it was a letter saying that the thrust of my article was in the same spirit as an article by one of the journal’s editors, Hans Vermeer,⁵ and would I not like to contribute? The following year, *TextConText* published “Who is Addressing Us When We Read a Translation?” (Mossop, 1987). Three years later, I attended my first TS conference abroad, at Helsingør (Elsinore) in Denmark. The conference was about translator training, and I

4. I served as the chair of the program committee for the organization’s annual conferences from 1991 to 1995 and a few of my publications (Mossop, 1988, 1996, 1998, 2006) were first read as papers at CATS/ACT conferences.

5. Vermeer (1982) had written about translation as an “offer of information” about another “offer of information”, which is something like reported discourse.

delivered a paper based on a survey I had conducted about revision teaching at Canadian translation schools (Mossop, 1992).

The 1980s saw the rise of reader-oriented theories of translation in Europe and elsewhere. Previously, before TS as such made its appearance, the initiative had been with those who thought that a theory of translation in general could be devised by taking language as the common denominator.⁶ While this did, for the first time, provide a unified outlook on translation, the isolation of language from the particular fields in which translators work meant that translation had come to be seen, under the influence of comparative linguistics, as a matter of correspondences between wordings in two languages, rather than someone's purpose-driven composing activity. This defect contributed to the popularity of the then-novel proclamation that "translation is communication", a notion I found congenial in part because the Translation Bureau where I worked was promoting the idea that its translators were communicating with speakers of the target language.

Now, while the communication meme appeared to socialize translation, by seeing it as a set of relationships among people rather than between wordings, the emphasis was on the receiving end of communications rather than the sending end. This held no great appeal for me since my work consisted in producing translations, not receiving them. The emphasis on the receiving end underlay the two major theoretical strands of the 1980s: Descriptive Translation Studies with its focus on translations as norm-governed facts of a target-language polysystem rather than as representations of source texts; and skopos theory, which taught translation students to think not about linguistic correspondences but about the function of the translation once it is in the hands of its final readers. In retrospect, these look like theories that would arise in the minds of people who

6. An idea first expressed by Andrei Fedorov in a 1953 introduction to the theory of translation. Soviet thinking about translation arrived in Western Europe in dribs and drabs through summaries and reviews by the few western scholars who could read Russian, rather than through translations. In criticizing Fedorov, the Russian/French interpreter Edmond Cary expressed an earlier view: "Whether one is translating poems or patents, one does need some knowledge of at least two languages. However that is only a starting point, one of the initial givens; it cannot form the objective foundation of any deep-going scientific study [...] Each genre [...] is sui generis, so distinctive that it needs to be considered separately, focusing on distinguishing features rather than common denominators" (1985 [1958], p. 29; my translation).

spend a lot of time reading students' unsatisfactory work, or reading and analyzing literary translations (often with a focus on how they differ from the source rather than on how they are similar, the prime concern of most non-literary translators like me).

In my work, I did of course read. I read source texts, and I read my own translations to find mistakes. I also revised other translators' work, which is mostly an exercise in reading. But the "translation as communication" paradigm was not interested in the reading that went on within the translator's office. Its focus was on what happened to translations after they left that office. A worthy topic, certainly, but of no immediate interest to me as a translation producer. As Barbara Folkart later expressed it:

The distinguishing characteristic of translation studies, I feel, should be that it is at least as concerned with writing as with reading. (2007, p. xiv)

So much of the discourse on translation is readerly—backward-looking, fixated on the already-said [...]. [...] Little of the canonical discourse on translation has anything to do with the actual business of making text. (*ibid.*, p. 30)

In the early 21st century, the production of translations did in fact begin to turn into a reading rather than a writing activity. The cause was the advent of commercially available Translation Memory systems, which recycled old translations. A Memory system arrived in my office in 2006. From then on, the previously empty computer folder where I would deposit my English translations contained a copy of the source text with some of the French sentences replaced by English wordings recycled from the Memory. So my task when I came to such a recycled wording was to *read* it and either accept or revise. In a further development, some translation providers began to use systems in which sentences not found in Memory are machine translated, with the result that the translator is faced from the outset with a document entirely in the target language. Translating was becoming an exercise in reading existing wordings rather than creating new ones.

At the turn of the century, Anthony Pym, who was editing the St. Jerome (now Routledge) series Translation Practices Explained, asked me to write a book about revision. That book (Mossop, 2001, 2019) became my ticket to international travel, as translation services and translation schools in a long list of countries asked me

to come and lead workshops for their revisers or students. However, as I mention at the end of every such workshop, revision may well be both a practical necessity and a very interesting topic to think and write about, but if my employer had ever demanded that I spend the whole day every day revising, I would have quit: I became a translator in order to create translations myself, not read other peoples' translations. The interest for me lies in inventing wordings, so it is perhaps just as well that I reached retirement age before Memory/MT turns translation into a revising exercise (if that is indeed the future). Revising requires an editor's mentality rather than a writer's mentality. I'm fairly good at revising but I do not particularly enjoy it.

The Neoliberal Era 1990-??

The study of languages has long had a geopolitical aspect; it has never been a purely cultural matter, or a political matter only in the restricted case of officially multilingual countries and organizations. For example, both foreign-language teaching and machine translation were of great military interest (and funded accordingly), the former for military personnel serving abroad, the latter for the science race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. With the advent of the current era of neoliberalism (free trade, deregulation, lower corporate taxes, privatization of public assets), translation became a profitable service industry that was vital to global business.

When free trade between Canada and Mexico began in 1994, Spanish became more important. Spanish-English translation was added to the course offerings at the School of Translation, and *Meta* began to publish a few articles in Spanish (as of 2017, all articles had Spanish abstracts). Even though I was a French-English translator, I welcomed the growing interest in other languages, in part because I live in a city where translation and interpretation between English and dozens of other languages is a daily occurrence, and in part because translation theory cannot develop properly on the basis of a single language pair.

In the early 1990s, neoliberalism came to the Canadian Government's civil service: it began to conduct itself on a business rather than a public service model. The Translation Bureau was moved from the culture ministry to the government services ministry, where it had to compete with the private sector for the

government's translation business (the government's budget for translation was transferred from the Bureau to the individual ministries, which then purchased translation services however they saw fit). This rather unhappy transformation, described in Mossop (2007), was mitigated somewhat by the fact that federal government translators had long been unionized, so that the pay and working conditions were quite good. However, before the neoliberal "turn", my manager had granted me two weeks each year to write about translation. This now ended: it was not "profitable" for me to write about translation instead of bringing in money by translating for those two weeks. After that, I wrote entirely on my own time, though I did keep pausing to jot down ideas as I translated.

In the years that followed, I expanded my range of writing based on personal interests: the image of translation in science fiction (Mossop, 1996); the application of translation theory to the problem of choirs singing in languages they do not know (Mossop, 2013); the role of German-English translation in the early gay liberation movement in Toronto (Mossop, 2014). Despite my full-time job as a translator working now under neoliberal conditions, I was able to write these articles fairly quickly because I had a lot of prior knowledge, from reading science fiction, singing in choirs, and being a gay liberation activist in the 1970s and 1980s.

The corporatization of public institutions also overtook universities in the 1990s. The result was decreased government funding, in particular for humanities subjects. Translation schools in other countries which treated translation as a branch of literary or cultural studies seem to have suffered accordingly. In Canada, however, most programs still led to bachelor's degrees in Translation (not in Translation Studies!) and they had been professionally oriented since their inception in the 1970s, mostly preparing students for work as official-language translators in government and business. At York University and elsewhere, practicing translators like me had been hired to teach the majority of the compulsory practical courses. While this was thought to be pedagogically desirable, it also turned out to dovetail with the requirements of the neoliberal era: to save money as funding declined, universities began hiring fewer tenured faculty and more contract instructors, who were much cheaper and worked on 4- or 8-month contracts with no research or publication requirements.

Incidentally, the close relationship in Canada between TS and training for non-literary official-languages translation meant that TS here would be rather different from TS in the United States, where Spanish has never become an official language. There, the field seems to have taken shape somewhat later and to have emerged mostly as a purely intellectual development within literary and cultural studies rather than in conjunction with the training of non-literary professional translators.

By the end of the century, a couple of Canadian universities were offering master's and even doctoral programs in Translation Studies. Unlike the professionally oriented bachelor's programs, these focus on research and theory. They are encouraged by the neoliberal university because graduate programs bring in high fees, especially from international students. I taught a revision course in the master's program at York in 2014 and 2016, and I had to focus on revision principles and the revision research literature because the students had half a dozen different native languages and no language pair in common. Practice had to be limited to editing English, which was of course much easier for the few native speakers.

Of interest in connection with neoliberalism is the English name of the discipline that studies translation. In the early 1970s, two names were suggested: "translatology" (by Brian Harris in Canada) and "translation studies" (by James Holmes in the Netherlands) (Harris, 2011; Holmes, 1988 [1972]). The latter name was already favoured before the neoliberal era but it endured, I think, because it associated translation scholarship with the humanities, which have been the main centres of resistance to the transformation of universities from educational institutions into quasi-corporate entities that compete with each other to attract private funding and sell courses for very high fees to "customers" (students). Even though in some countries the new discipline was financially dependent on fees from students intending to become professional translators, a name was preferred that suggested a humanistic rather than a scientific pursuit, as would have been suggested by the "-ology" suffix. Another possible advantage of this choice was the plural "studies", a vague word that has encouraged an extremely wide range of interests (and hence a large number of scholars and paying graduate students) to congregate under the TS umbrella.

In the French-speaking world, where there is not such a

rigid verbal distinction between sciences and humanities (*sciences humaines*), the name “traductologie” came to be accepted (Goffin, 2006). One might have thought that in Canada, the proposal by an Anglophone (Harris) of an English name obviously related to “traductologie” would have succeeded, for in Canada the study of translation was initiated for the most part by Francophones. Indeed, the principal language used at CATS/ACT conferences was French until the turn of the century (when English came to dominate because of the increased presence of people researching language pairs other than English/French). However, despite the dominant role of French in Canadian translation, by the time CATS/ACT was founded in 1987, the name “translation studies” had already been adopted by English-speaking scholars in Western Europe. It had become known to quite a wide audience in the English-speaking world through Susan Bassnett’s short 1980 paperback *Translation Studies*, from the mainstream commercial publisher Methuen’s in its popular New Accents series. TS was thus chosen for the association’s name by the English Canadians present at the meeting. According to two other Anglophones who were present, there was a discussion during which “translatology” was specifically rejected.⁷

What’s happening now in TSWorld?

In one sense, things are flourishing, especially outside Europe. Never have there been so many journals (and profit-seeking publishers!), conferences, students busily studying and scholars busy writing about this or that aspect of translation. On the other hand, there does seem to be a great deal of publishing going on to meet job requirements rather than to advance knowledge. Also, the knowledge that has been gained about translation is hardly being diffused at all to other disciplines or to the general public. With few exceptions, the denizens of TSWorld do not seem much interested in cross-border flows; life in that world is lived vigorously, but in

7. “Translatology” has certainly been used, though mostly, as a Google search reveals, by speakers of English as a second language. For example, a journal founded in Denmark in 1993 was until recently called *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*. This suggests that perhaps a problem for native English speakers in the UK and US was that “translatology” sounded foreign (or pretentious, i.e. too “French”). And speaking of sound, Candace Séguinot pointed out, at the founding CATS/ACT meeting, that the stress falls on the syllable “ol”, thus eliding the first two, semantically important syllables!

a silo. Pym and Bassnett (2017, p. 146) suggest that the study of translation be integrated into law, medicine, business and other programs rather than being shuttered away in translation programs.

More worryingly, ever since the widespread rejection of “equivalence” as a unifying concept, TS has ballooned into an unfocused grab-bag with no defined object of study, or as Pym and Bassnett put it, “a sort of monstrous thing, like the man-eating plant in *Little Shop of Horrors*” (*ibid.*, p. 145). “The idea of translation as a loosely conceived metaphorical concept has spread, to the detriment of attention being paid to what actually happens when you take a text in one language and try to put it into another” (*ibid.*, p. 150). I proposed a fairly narrow definition of the object of study in Mossop (2017), but it is probably not in tune with the current mood. I still attend international TS conferences, but because of the vast range of topics covered, I pick conferences only in cities I’d like to explore during the long hours when there is nothing of interest to me, or in countries I’d like to tour before or after the conference.

Whether the study of translation can be saved from its amorphous state—indeed whether there is any widespread desire to save it—is an open question. Perhaps it’s a generational matter: younger people no doubt have a different outlook from those of us who became interested in translation and its study before the age of the internet and neoliberal economics.

A different journey: studying translation without Translation Studies

What if the study of translation had never been institutionalized, with the usual apparatus of specialist journals and publishers, conferences, degree programs, TS associations like CATS/ACT, and sometimes separate university departments? How would my journey have differed? I would still have been a Certified Translator, for the translation profession had long been institutionalized in Canada.⁸ I would still have been an instructor at York University’s School of Translation. But what of my writings? Those that deal

8. An association of translators appeared as early as 1920 in the capital city Ottawa; the federal government assembled translators from the various ministries in a single entity through the Translation Bureau Act of 1934; and the first training course in English-to-French translation was organized in 1936 at the University of Ottawa (Delisle, 1987, p. 65).

with practical and pedagogical matters (about 20 out of 60 items) could still have appeared in Translation Bureau publications or in journals and magazines like *Meta* and *Circuit*; as for the rest, that would have depended on how the study of translation proceeded without a separate recognized discipline.

Gile (2012), Lambert (2013) and Gambier (2018) tell us *how* the study of translation became institutionalized, but not *why*.⁹ When TS began to emerge in the 1980s, academics from various disciplines had already been writing about translation for some time, in many places around the world. Also, formal (as opposed to on-job) translator training had existed for many years, and not always under the umbrella of a university. Why did that situation not simply continue? The increased demand for translators in the post-war world required only the expansion and proliferation of translator training establishments; it does not explain the appearance of TS.

My suggestion for exploring the *why* question is to take inspiration from science-fiction alternate history novels, and speculate about circumstances under which TS never comes into existence as an institutionalized academic discipline. In this way, light may be shed on what happened through the contrast with what did not happen. In addition, we may be able to see how the study of translation could have been more narrowly defined.

In one fictive scenario, around 1970 the Fédération internationale des traducteurs (FIT) sets up an institute for the study of translation and interpreting, to carry out research aimed at improving translator training and the quality of translations. The new institute is funded partly by FIT member fees, partly by the European Economic Community, forerunner of the European Union, and partly by a few countries that have government translation services or a well established private translation industry or both. In short order, branches of the institute pop up in various locations around the world where translators' associations belonging to FIT are present. The researchers are former translators and interpreters; a few may have also worked in universities, but the institute has no formal affiliation with any university. Research results are reported in the FIT journal *Babel* (founded in 1955), or in national journals

9. Pym (1995, p.159 and pp.167-168; 2011, p.7 and p.9) provides some interesting suggestions about why Translation Studies emerged as a separate university-based discipline when it did, but this is not the place to discuss them.

such as *Meta* (in its original incarnation as a translators' journal). No strictly academic publications like *Target* or *The Translator* ever see the light.

In this scenario, a few scholars in university departments of literature, linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, computer science, and so on, continue as before to investigate translation, in each case with a suitable definition of the object of study. But these scholars have no motivation to launch a separate discipline: they do not communicate with each other and do not come to feel that they share a distinctive set of problems. Unlike in real history, there are no translator training programs within universities that might provide a location for common efforts. Translators are trained in part on the job, in part through occasional workshops organized by employers or translators' associations, and in part through evening courses at non-university educational institutions or perhaps in university extension programs—the situation that existed in Toronto when I became a translator.

Under this FIT scenario, research in translation is closely wedded to its practice. Research focuses more on translators than on translations, and as a result, translators and their employers take a great interest in the institute's findings. Translating and interpreting are defined fairly narrowly to mean what members of FIT's affiliates around the world do to make a living. No "interdiscipline" arises within the institute because there are no university-based disciplines involved. Empirical research on translators starts much earlier under this scenario than it did in real history: studies of cognitive processes, translators' use of computer aids,¹⁰ and the various sociological matters described by Chesterman (2009, pp. 16-18)—social status and pay; workplace organization, and

10. In real history, research on machine translation began around 1950 and was for the most part conducted outside universities by computer companies and governments. When it arrived in universities in the 1960s, it did so as part of computational linguistics. (I audited a course on language processing given by the University of Toronto's Department of Computer Science in 1987, with machine translation as one topic). In 1976, I started using the terminology database Termium from a remote terminal in my office that connected to a mainframe computer in Ottawa, and in the early 1980s, a Philips Micom word processor replaced my IBM Selectric typewriter. However, within TS, empirical research on computer tools in translation workplaces did not get underway until the 21st century.

so on.¹¹ More generally, research in the sense of fact-finding and observation gets underway immediately. Theory then grows out of the research instead of taking place in the fact-free vacuum which, in real history, made it possible, for example, to take the concept of untranslatability seriously. A happy result is that certain deficiencies of early TS never arise. First, theory is not confused with disguised normative statements about the proper way to translate, because no single “proper way” exists among the world’s professional translators. Second, in published research, textual examples are taken from observational data gathered in order to test hypotheses rather than being simply illustrations (often invented) to make a point clear.

In a second fictive scenario, the study of translation remains a part of applied linguistics, while translator training takes place at specialized non-university institutes. The field then benefits from the transformation that applied linguistics underwent in real history. As time passed, it separated itself institutionally from general linguistics and was redefined by most of its practitioners as an enterprise devoted to solving language-related “real world” problems by drawing on insights from a variety of disciplines, not just linguistics.¹² The starting point was now some social problem, not a theory from linguistics. In this scenario, problems are articulated by translators, through their associations or online forums, or by policy-makers concerned with multilingual communication. Researchers then apply knowledge from various disciplines to try to solve the problems so identified. The range of problems considered delimits the object of study.

Originally, applied linguistics had been narrowly defined as “linguistics applied” (to foreign language teaching at first). Catford’s

11. While I did not personally have time for empirical research, I did contribute to these topics, writing about workplace procedures (Mossop, 2000), computerization in translation workplaces (Mossop, 2006), and motivation as a workplace factor (Mossop, 2014).

12. The mission of the American Association for Applied Linguistics, according to its website, is “to facilitate the advancement and dissemination of knowledge and understanding regarding [...] language-related issues in order to improve the lives of individuals and conditions in society” (American Association for Applied Linguistics, 2018, n.p.). The field “draws on a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches from various disciplines—from the humanities to the social and natural sciences—as it develops its own knowledge-base about language, its users and uses, and their underlying social and material conditions” (*ibid.*).

1965 book, based on lectures he gave in the School of Applied Linguistics at Edinburgh University, is a perfect example: it first sets out Michael Halliday's theory of language structure and then shows how translation can be understood in terms of that theory.

By the mid 1980s, the notion of translation as applied linguistics in this narrow sense was on the way out among most translation specialists. This was so in part because linguistics had become identified with the widely rejected equivalence paradigm, and perhaps also because of the obvious failings of one particular application of comparative grammar—rule-based machine translation. The linguistics approach was also criticized for focusing on words and sentences, ignoring text-level features—a criticism that has merit as long as attention is not completely diverted from the sentence, which is more or less the largest unit of source text which a working translator can hold in mind at any one time. Finally, the linguistics approach was rightly seen as too narrow, since translators have to consider a wide variety of non-linguistic factors in order to decide on an appropriate wording.¹³

James Holmes' famous map of Translation Studies (proposed in a paper he delivered at an international applied linguistics congress) does include the application of knowledge to practical problems, though the knowledge in question is limited to that derived from translation description and translation theory. The problems he mentions are translator training, translation aids, translation criticism (which perhaps covers quality assessment and reviews of literary translations) and translation policy, which includes:

defining the place and role of translators, translating and translation in society at large [...] determining what works need to be translated in a given socio-cultural situation [...] what part translating should play in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. (Holmes, 1988 [1972], p. 78).

By the time Holmes was writing these words, Eugene Nida had been thinking for quarter of a century about a specific “real world” problem: the best way to translate the Christian Bible for purposes of evangelization. In his 1964 book *Toward a Science of Translating*, he was writing from within his own field of linguistics, taking

13. In the 21st century, interest in linguistics revived to some degree among translation scholars; Juliane House (2016) positions the study of translation within applied linguistics.

examples from the Bible but considering translation in general. In the introduction, Nida clarified the title:

though no one will deny the artistic elements in good translating, linguists and philologists are becoming increasingly aware that the processes of translation are amenable to rigorous description. When we speak of ‘the science of translating’, we are of course concerned with the descriptive aspect. (Nida, 1964, p. 3).

So by “science”, he meant the aspect of translating work that is amenable to scientific (rigorous) description. He was not suggesting a new discipline but rather that knowledge from existing disciplines—he mentions psychology, anthropology, philosophy and several others—be applied to describing the translating process (*ibid.*, pp. 6-8).

Nida mentions that “practice in translating has far outdistanced theory” (*ibid.*, p. 3), and I see his book as showing how general theory can emerge from consideration of particular practices (in his case, Bible translating). Certainly most of what I have written by way of theory has been informed by my work as a government translator.

Nida is often described as one of the precursors of TS, but that is a retrospective view. Could theory and research about translation have emerged without the institutionalization of a new discipline? I’ve suggested a few alternative locations: within applied linguistics; within non-university translator training establishments; within a research institute operated by the FIT. The first two of these had already begun to produce theory and research in the immediate postwar world, but then something happened in Western Europe, and here in Canada—something that led to what we now call Translation Studies. What was it? Too much resistance from existing disciplines to new thinking about translation? Felicitous meetings of a few particular individuals some time in the 1970s? A perceived opportunity for academic empire-building? Whatever the reason, there is now no longer a need for a single space for reflection about translation. TSWorld can now safely shrink and define translation more narrowly. Research and writing on topics falling outside the new definition can be pursued in other places within the university, or even outside it, among practitioners.

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