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## **Translation Studies: Focus on the Translator**

### **– Introduction to the thematic section**

Translation Studies (TS) has gradually established itself as an independent field of study over the past three decades or so, and in this relatively short period of time we have witnessed an overwhelming increase in publications on translation. However, although the literature abounds with publications addressing translations (the products) and translating (the process), the translators themselves – the people who produce the translated texts and engage in the translation processes – have attracted surprisingly little attention so far (see also Dam/Zethsen 2008). With this thematic section of *Hermes* we wish to start making up for this deficiency.

The lack of focus on the translator in the TS literature so far is perhaps not so surprising if we go back to James Holmes' map of TS in *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies* (1972), which is generally considered the founding document of TS. As we shall see in the article by Andrew Chesterman in this volume (cf. below), Holmes' map contains no explicit mention of the human translators involved in the translation process. However, TS has in fact been focusing increasingly on the translators themselves in recent years, and certain subfields of translation studies do have a certain tradition for centering on the translator. One area that does in fact focus on the translator falls under the cultural studies paradigm and covers, for example, Lawrence Venuti's interest in translators' (in)visibility (e.g. Venuti 1995) and feminist concerns with

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translators in a gender context (e.g. Chamberlain 1988/2000). However, these scholars work almost exclusively with literary translation, whereas this thematic section is mainly concerned with non-literary translation, as we wish to show that also outside the field of literary translation, notably in business translation, there is a growing interest in the translators themselves.

Interpreting Studies is another subfield of TS which has traditionally been interested in the translator, *in casu* the interpreter (who is also included in the cover term 'translator' here). In particular, research on community interpreting has always been concerned with the role of the interpreter in interpreted interaction, as we shall see in the article by Bente Jacobsen in this volume (cf. below). But also the huge amount of cognitively oriented process studies, which have always been the hallmark of conference interpreting research and which have more recently become very popular also in research on written translation, is a case in point. With their focus on what goes on in the mind of the translator, process studies are clearly candidates for the subfield of TS which Andrew Chesterman suggests to name "Translator Studies" in this volume (cf. below). However, process-oriented studies arguably suffer from a tendency to treat the translators themselves as a more or less "transparent medium" of cognitive processes (phrase adapted from Sela-Sheffy/Shlesinger 2008: 81), as depersonalised 'black boxes', rather than as agents in their own right. As Chesterman points out, "all research on (human) translations must surely at least imply that there are indeed translators behind the translations, people behind the texts. But not all translation research takes these people as the primary and explicit focus, the starting point, the central concept of the research question." (Chesterman, this volume p. 13-14). Translator Studies, on the other hand, "covers research which focuses primarily and explicitly on the agents involved in translation" (Chesterman, this volume p. 20). Process-oriented studies of translation arguably focus neither primarily nor explicitly on the translators involved in the processes. In this respect, the process-oriented line of research actually resembles the bulk of product-oriented translation research, which generally shows very little interest in the people behind the texts.

This thematic section does not pretend to be representative of all facets of and current trends in "Translator Studies", but with its selection of papers with a shared focus on the agents who translate, it does cap-

ture a new general tendency in translation studies to focus on the translators themselves and to treat them as (social) agents in their own right, as a group with its own interests, attitudes, identity and history. In this sense, the thematic section is a contribution to the emergent sociological paradigm in translation studies and reflects the field's so-called "sociological turn" (Inghilleri 2005, Chesterman 2006, Pym et al. 2006, Snell-Hornby 2006, Wolf 2006, Wolf/Fukari 2007). Thus, all the contributions are concerned with translators in society, see translators as social agents, and address such issues as the status of translators, their working conditions, identity, public image and self-image, translators' networks, role perceptions, power relations, etc.

In the first article, *The Name and Nature of Translator Studies*, **Andrew Chesterman** outlines a new subfield within translation studies which he suggests naming *Translator Studies*. The article argues that the new focus on the translator is inadequately represented in Holmes' classic map of TS which was highly weighted towards texts rather than the people that produce them, and Chesterman therefore provides an alternative classification of translation studies which allows the inclusion and description of the suggested subfield of *Translator Studies*.

In the following article, *Humanizing Translation History*, **Anthony Pym** deplores the lack of focus in TS so far on the social roles played by translators mediating between cultures, and he suggests two methodological principles in order to bring about a "humanization" of translation studies. The first principle is to study translators first and only then the texts they produce; the second is to look for so-called professional intercultural spaces, where we typically find translators located, i.e. overlaps between (primary) cultures which function as social and cultural spaces themselves with their own structures and dynamics. The proposed methodology is illustrated by examples from Hispanic translation history but is applicable to other subfields of translation studies as well, as becomes clear from the next article in this volume.

In *Translators as Networkers: The Role of Virtual Communities*, **Hanna Risku and Angela Dickinson** take a close look at a contemporary model example of Pym's intercultural spaces, namely virtual translator communities, i.e. online communities of practice that bring together professional translators for the purposes of sharing knowledge, collaborating, and networking. Risku and Dickinson analyse the phenomenon

of such online communities, identifying and discussing a number of their key features and the motivations for professional translators joining and participating in such forums.

In her article *Meta-discourse as a Source for Exploring the Professional Image(s) of Conference Interpreters*, **Ebru Diriker** explores the public image and self-image of conference interpreters as it is represented in the discourse of professional organizations, the popular and academic literature, and the (Turkish) media. In particular, Diriker explores the convergences and divergences between how outsiders and insiders (re)present conference interpreters and their profession, and discusses the implications on the perception and practice of this particular group of translators.

**Kaisa Koskinen's** article *Going Localised – Getting Recognised. The Interplay of the Institutional and the Experienced Status of Translators in the European Commission* investigates whether and how different institutional and organisational contexts affect translators' professional activities and professional identities. The data consists of institutional documents as well as interview and observation data from two different settings, a traditional translation unit in Luxembourg and the local representation of the European Commission in Helsinki.

In his article *Translation Theory and Professional Practice: A Global Survey of the Great Divide*, **David Katan** sets out to investigate to what extent the academic belief that translators have increasingly become empowered to intervene, to mediate and to tackle conflict rather than copy (invisibly) is actually reflected in the workplace. By means of questionnaires, Katan aims at finding out whether translators themselves believe they are creators rather than copiers and to what extent they *de facto* find themselves in a position to control their output.

In the last article in the thematic section, *The Community Interpreter: A Question of Role*, **Bente Jacobsen** gives an overview of research on community interpreting, a subfield of translation (and interpreting) studies which, unlike many other subfields of TS, has traditionally focused on the individual performing the translation, i.e. the interpreter, as opposed to interpreting or interpreted texts. As Jacobsen explains, research on community interpreting has traditionally centered on the interpreter's actual and perceived role in interpreted interaction, a sociological issue with close links to translator image and identity, which

are central concepts in the articles by both Diriker, Koskinen and Katan in this volume.

The subtitle we have chosen for the thematic section – *Focus on the Translator* – should be understood both as a descriptive and a prescriptive statement. On the one hand, translators have begun to attract some attention in TS already, as explained above and illustrated by the articles included here. On the other hand, much more research is needed within this area to gain more knowledge on translators and interpreters as a social and professional group and hopefully in the long run be able to strengthen the status, image and identity of the profession. We should therefore like to issue an invitation to translation scholars around the world: let us (continue to) *focus on the translator!*

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