The Quest for an Eclectic Methodology of Translation Description

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Abstract: In this article I argue in favour of an eclectic methodology in translation studies reconciling descriptive-empirical and critical-explanatory approaches, even though the former focus on quasi-scientific methods and the latter pursue a historical-hermeneutic understanding of translation. It is argued that descriptive translation studies should make a crucial concession and acknowledge the role of evaluation in translation description. The specific view of empiricism underpinning current descriptive approaches — logical empiricism — is at fault insofar as it promotes a positivistic, value-free conception of research. On the other hand, historical empiricism acknowledges the role of evaluation in research. Methodological eclecticism, however, also requires us to go beyond system-oriented thinking and its search for patterned regularities (or norm-governed behaviour). It is suggested, in particular, that translation scholars should harmonize quantitative analysis (which focuses on patterned regularities) and qualitative analysis (which deals with single choices of a personal-ideological nature). If we are to achieve methodological eclecticism we must enhance the sophistication or explanatory power of descriptive translation studies. But this requires descriptive-empiricists to foreground the human translator and the hermeneutic issues involved in the translation process.

1. A false opposition: descriptive-empirical approaches vs. critical-explanatory approaches

The predicament of translation studies at the present moment is the lack of an eclectic methodological framework capable of accommodating a wide range of research interests. Declarations of intent in the critical literature stress the need to go beyond a single perspective or discipline, but in actual fact we still have some way to go before a fully-fledged eclectic approach is established. At the same time, no reflection on eclecticism can afford to disregard Mona Baker’s caveat: “Translation scholars must recognize that no approach, however sophisticated, can provide the answer to all the questions raised in the discipline nor the tools and methodology required for conducting research in all areas of translation studies” (1998: 280).

In my opinion it is possible to develop an eclectic approach which harmonizes the insights of Gideon Toury (1995), Mona Baker (1993, 1996), André Lefevere (1992), Anthony Pym (1998), Susan Bassnett (1991), Lawrence Venuti (1995, 1998) and Theo Hermans (1985, 1995, 1999) — even though these scholars seem to have totally different methodological approaches. Toury’s and Baker’s inductive and quasi-scientific methods (required by the search for patterned regularities) seem at odds with Pym’s emphasis on the human translator and historical research in general. Bassnett’s, Lefevere’s, Venuti’s and Hermans’s ideological concerns with ‘manipulation’ or the translator’s agency demand an historical and critical-explanatory approach rather than a purely scientific one.

In this essay I want to argue that the — in my view, false — opposition between empirical-descriptive and critical-explanatory approaches is a hurdle on the path towards methodological eclecticism in translation studies. The disagreement between empiricists-descriptivists (Toury and Baker) and translation historians (Pym, Lefevere, Bassnett, Venuti and Hermans) has more to do with methodological issues than with philosophical foundations. Among the questions relevant to all translation scholars are the following: what counts as adequate evidence in translation research? A single target text? A corpus of ‘representative’ texts? Can a corpus be designed in such a way as to be representative? When we have reached agreement on the nature of the evidence by setting up an adequate corpus, which features of translation behaviour should we single out as relevant or meaningful? Do we look for regularities of behaviour or instances of creativity on the part of translators? In this article I shall attempt to deal with these questions.

The different methodological approaches in translation studies may be reconciled in the context of a unifying epistemological principle — empiricism — provided descriptive translation studies broaden its scope and take into account the observations of translation historians. A quarter of a century ago Giulio Preti convincingly argued that empirical and historical approaches can be harmonized: historical research has a philological aspect (e.g. explaining agency and causation, that is, linking causes and effects in a given context), which requires empirical verification, while historical research cannot shun the evaluative judgments that typify historical studies — ‘observable facts’ may very well be the point of departure for empiricists, but it is the scholar’s interpretation that imposes a conceptual order on facts and assesses the significance of empirical data in the first place (Preti 1975: 155).

Therefore, I do not believe that “the empirical bias of the descriptive approach” per se is a flaw, as Hermans (1999: 44) seems to contend. Rather, one of the major problems with current empirical-descriptive approaches is their reductionist

1 I make no reference to Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory because, as Hermans (1999: 102) argues, “there is no necessary connection” between this theory and descriptive-empirical approaches to translation studies. This of course is not to deny the ground-breaking significance of Even-Zohar’s thinking. By the same token, I have not referred to a number of important descriptivists such as, for example, Andrew Chesterman and José Lambert for the sake of economy and conciseness. The position of these (and other) scholars of a descriptive-empiricist persuasion is discussed by Hermans (1999), the most nuanced and comprehensive account of descriptive translation studies to date.
Crosscultural Transgressions

Translation theory establishes general principles with the aim of explaining and predicting the phenomena of translating (Holmes 1988: 71). It uses the results of descriptive translation studies together with insights from various other disciplines (linguistics, comparative literature, sociology, etc.) to develop theories and models with explanatory and predictive power. Applied translation studies (applied extensions of translation studies in Toury’s revised map of translation studies, see Figure 1) are concerned with practical applications like translator training.

Figure 1: Toury’s diagram mapping the “relations between Translation Studies and its applied extensions” (1995: 18)

I agree with Holmes (1988: 71) and Toury (1995: 1) that the study of translation, whether theoretical or descriptive, is an empirical discipline concerned with describing what translation is rather than what it should be. Toury, in actual fact, seems to posit a gap between theoretical and descriptive studies on the one hand, and their applied extensions on the other (even though he envisages some kind of contact between these branches of the discipline); the latter are concerned with setting norms rather than with explaining or predicting facts of real life. Descriptivists “refuse to draw any conclusions in the form of recommendations for ‘proper’ behaviour” (Toury 1995: 2). I believe historians should reason along the same lines. Even Hermans, who criticizes the limitations of descriptive-empirical approaches, argues that “the critical task of translation theory does not consist in advocating this or that resistant or oppositional or compliant or fluent or any other mode of translating” (1999: 156; I shall return to Hermans’s view of translation theory’s critical task).

So far so good. Toury’s point of departure, empiricism, is theoretically sound. It is unfortunate, however, that Toury’s thinking is at times an obstacle on the path to eclecticism. The fault lies with his belief that an anti-prescriptive stance requires the banishment of evaluation. Let us consider his statement that descriptive translation studies do not establish appropriate translation methods, any more than

2. Description and evaluation in translation research

But why are empiricist descriptivists under the spell of logical empiricism (and consequently play down the role of evaluation in translation research)? Let us consider the thinking of a leading descriptivist, Gideon Toury.

Toury constructed a diagrammatic representation of James Holmes’s sketch of translation studies, according to which the discipline has two branches: pure and applied. The first is divided into descriptive translation studies and translation theory.
linguistics determines "appropriate ways of language use" (Toury 1995: 17). I accept the first part of this statement but not the second. The analogy whereby the goals of descriptive translation studies coincide with those of a reductionist conception of linguistics is misleading. Descriptivists, Toury goes on to argue, should "refrain from value judgments in selecting subject matter or in presenting findings" (1995: 2). This highly problematic conviction leads him to adopt a scientific attitude which emphasizes neutrality and objectivity. And Toury's value-free conception of linguistics, which he applies to translation research, is a source of misunderstanding among translation scholars. Lawrence Venuti, for one, criticizes linguistics-oriented approaches, which, he claims, study translation "as a set of systematic operations autonomous from the cultural and social formations in which they are executed" (1998: 25). It may be argued that Venuti's criticism applies to the search for universals or laws of translation, but not necessarily to the study of translation norms, which are rooted in a given, and thus historical, society and culture. Even though I would not endorse Venuti's assertion that "the most worrisome tendency in linguistics-oriented approaches is their promotion of scientific models" (1998: 25), Toury himself might be responsible for it. Toury promotes a scientific, linguistics-oriented concept of translation research, which is typical of logical empiricism. But by no means all branches of linguistics presuppose a conception in which the scholar's aim is to separate "fact from value" (Venuti 1998: 29).

Let us pursue further the analogy between descriptive translation studies and linguistics. My aim is not to determine the nature of linguistic inquiry, but simply to throw light on Toury's conception of empirical research. As Deborah Cameron (1995: 4) points out, linguists often equate description with the search for objective facts and prescription with a concern for subjective value judgements. But the distinction between norm-observing and norm-enforcing statements is a highly controversial one in linguistics. Linguists like Cameron (1995) and Talbot Taylor (1990) regard normativity as inherent in descriptions. Taylor casts doubt on the dualism between descriptive statements, conceived of as purely objective, and normative statements, which rely on authority and power (1990: 21). Statements in authoritative dictionaries, Taylor argues, "are not descriptions of facts, but rather citations of norms" (1990: 24). No matter how neutral the descriptivist considers them to be, their perceived normative force will inevitably affect the linguistic choices of individual speakers. Cameron claims that the point of describing grammar is precisely to establish what the norms are, "so they can be prescribed with confidence to users of the language" (1995: 10).

Milroy's observations are more directly relevant to descriptive translation studies. Milroy, who focuses on the relationship between language and society, believes that language descriptions are normative "because to be accurate they have to coincide as closely as possible with the consensus norms of the community concerned" (1992: 8-9). Yet, he does not equate normative with prescriptive. Unlike Cameron and Taylor, Milroy insists that linguists may distinguish between "observing a norm for descriptive purposes and enforcing a norm prescriptively" (ibid.). But he is also convinced that norm-observing is inseparable from the researcher's value judgments. I too subscribe to this conviction.

I believe that the real obstacle to eclecticism in translation studies is the binary distinction between descriptive statements and value judgments. Toury, it seems to me, is eager to discard value judgments because he equates descriptive translation studies with a reductionist conception of (possibly theoretical) linguistics, whereby evaluation necessarily entails a prescriptive attitude. But value judgments are not always synonymous with prescriptive statements, even though recommendations for proper translation behaviour are obviously based on socially valid judgments. Cameron's (1995: 4) and Taylor's (1990: 25) point that an ideologically neutral linguistic science does not exist applies to descriptive translation studies, too.

Toury seems reluctant to accept the implications of his own thinking. Empiricism does not necessarily imply that a descriptive framework can be conceived in a vacuum, that is, without an act of interpretation. Toury, in fact, specifically refers to
"descriptive-explanatory" studies executed within "descriptive translation studies (1995: 15). And no explanatory study can banish value judgments. One has to acknowledge that no descriptive framework of analysis is immune to interpretative bias. Although there are degrees of bias (the search for universals of translation may be less dependent on value judgments than historical investigations), the fact remains that value judgments influence the selection of data as well as the descriptive categories of analysis and the explanatory theories into which these are organized. This view is widely accepted even by those epistemologists who oppose post-structuralism. Susan Haack, for example, contends that "the epistemologist cannot be a completely detached observer, because to do epistemology at all (or to undertake any kind of inquiry) one must employ some standards of evidence, of what counts as a reason for or against a belief — standards which one takes to be an indication of truth" (1993: 13).

It is unsurprising that several influential translation scholars disagree with Toury’s scientific approach. The opposition to Toury’s view of objectivity and neutrality is strongest among translation historians. Hermans observes that "the claim to neutrality or objectivity is already an ideological statement in itself" (1999: 36). Translation scholars, Hermans argues, need a critical theory which "tells the observer what to look for and how to assess the significance of what is being observed" (1999: 34). José Lambert has cast doubt on the very distinction between evaluation and description (1991: 31). Anthony Pym, too, stresses that a totally neutral description is a chimera (1998: 9), and Dirk Delabastita is convinced that the selection and description of historical facts "will always be directed by certain a priori assumptions" (1991: 140). Venuti makes the same point: "even at the level of devising and executing a research project, a scholarly interpretation will be laden with the values of its cultural situation" (1998: 28-9).

Let us consider the seminal notion of translation norms. Unlike universals or laws of translation (which I shall consider in the next section), these are historically determined and have (a measure of) prescriptive force within a given target tradition. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain in detail the rationale behind the concept of translation norms (an account is provided in Hermans 1999). Suffice it to say that translation norms allegedly reveal the concept of translation in a given society at a specific moment in time, that is, they are representative of translation behaviour from an historical perspective. Norms "are a product of a tradition of translating in specific ways which can only be observed and elaborated through the analysis of a representative body of translated texts in a given language or culture" (Baker 1993: 240).

However, the assumption that corpora may be representative of translation behaviour is highly problematic. How do we decide on the inclusion in a corpus of a certain body of translated texts in a given language or culture? One cannot escape the fact that the very design of corpora arises out of an act of interpretation. For instance, my selection of the most "representative" Anglo-American translators of Dante’s Comedy (discussed in Crisafulli 2000) was based on implicit theoretical assumptions, which I took for granted. On what grounds did I include certain translations rather than others, and regard them as representative of a specific tradition of rewriting Dante? The design of my corpus was motivated partly by considerations of literary merit (I selected what I regarded as the most poetic translations, which implies an idealized conception of literature) and partly by a preconceived notion of what counts as an adequate translation of Dante’s Comedy in the first place (I eschewed prose translations and included only a select few verse translations, which presupposes an idealized conception of translation). The ideologically-biased nature of historical corpora, and consequently of translation norms, casts serious doubt on any strict dualism between description and evaluation.

This is not to say that my corpus does not yield interesting facts about the behaviour of a more or less representative group of Anglo-American translators. But can we single out allegedly objective empirical facts, such as translation norms or tendencies of translation behaviour, from such a corpus? I believe we can generalize only in tentative terms: empirical facts do not exist independently of the scholar’s viewpoint; indeed, it is the scholar who creates the empirical facts of the analysis by making observable (raw) data relevant to his/her perspective. For example, it may be that one’s idealized conception of translation leads one to focus on predominantly mainstream or conservative translators. If this is the case the patterns yielded by the analysis will reflect such an a priori or idealized conception and show translation to be a fundamentally conservative enterprise.

It is not only corpus design that is ideologically biased. Venuti provides an excellent example of how the very formulation of translation norms may be ideologically charged. Toury formulates a norm whereby a Hebrew translator of Shakespeare’s sonnets censors the text by changing the addressee’s gender from male to female. This norm ensured the translation’s acceptability in twentieth-century Hebrew culture where homosexuality was unacceptable. According to Venuti:

Toury’s account, even if he doesn’t brand the translation homophobic, is nonetheless distant from homophobia [...] it seems clear that his formulation of the norm is slanted towards liberalism. If he shared the translator’s conservatism, Toury might have called the translation a voluntary expression of moral propriety. (Venuti 1998: 29)

The scholar’s categories of analysis cannot be neutral descriptions. They imply certain political and ideological assumptions. From this point of view it is correct to say that the researcher’s beliefs govern all types of historical scholarship. But the search for methodological eclecticism requires us to proceed further and take a critical look at the notion of "patterned regularity", which underpins descriptive or system-oriented thinking.
3. Patterned regularities vs. idiosyncrasy and creativity

The problem of translation research is how to achieve a balance between conformity and regularity, on the one hand, and change and creativity on the other; between norm-governed (the trans-individual or collective dimension, which verges on the sociological) and idiosyncratic behaviour (the individual dimension, which foregrounds the human agent); between universal (a-historical) tendencies and personal or text-specific choices.

An eclectic approach integrating quantitative and qualitative types of analysis goes some way towards reconciling these apparent dichotomies. Obviously, this reconciliation will not be successful unless translation scholars of all persuasions become aware that description and evaluation are inseparable. However, this is not sufficient by itself. We must also expose the implications of system-oriented thinking, which is closely linked with empirical-descriptive approaches.

Let us consider Toury's thinking again. Following in Holmes's footsteps (1988: 78), Toury (1995: 11) treats all the branches of translation studies as interdependent but sees the relationship between the theoretical and descriptive branches as lying at the core of the discipline. The findings of descriptive studies lead to the establishment of "regularities of behaviour" which in turn will enable theoreticians "to formulate a series of coherent laws" (Toury 1995: 16).

Toury's laws are similar to Baker's (1993, 1996) universals of translation, patterns of linguistic behaviour which are inherent in translation. Toury's law of growing standardization, for example, states that translators tend to favour the established or habitual "options offered by a target repertoire" (1995: 268), that is, they tend to be conservative. Baker also notes that translators across a variety of languages have been observed to simplify, disambiguate and make explicit the target text's message (Baker 1993: 243, 246; 1996: 176).

The first problem for translation historians is that the search for universals or laws isolates certain features in an abstract realm where historical problems have no or very little bearing. As Venuti (1998: 25) puts it, the search for laws and universals presupposes a conception in which one should "purify translation practices and situations of their social and historical variables". True, this is only one aspect of descriptive research into translation (the study of translation norms is a-historical, but it is trans-individual). The second and more serious problem is that scholars of a descriptive-empiricist persuasion tend to subsume all the translator's interventions - even those that occur in single target texts - under the concept of norm-governed or patterned behaviour.

The translator's choices, Toury claims, are not the unaccountable product of idiosyncratic decisions on his/her part. The translator's choices show internal consistency. Toury (1995: 147) in fact asserts that "decisions made by an individual translator while translating a single text are far from erratic. Rather, even though by no means all-embracing, they tend to be highly patterned'. This implies that one has to look for meaningful regularities in the data yielded by the analysis. Lefevere, who reasons along the same lines, claims that "an isolated mistake is, probably, just that, whereas a recurrent series of mistakes' most likely points to a pattern that is the expression of a strategy" (1992: 97). And strategies, I should add, might point to tendencies of translation behaviour either-in a given historical context (norms) or across cultures and languages (universals of translation).

Although Toury's point of departure is perfectly legitimate, system-oriented thinking neglects the individual translator. One may argue that this is a price that has to be paid: norms, or tendencies, can only be abstracted from a large number of target texts, by considering the features they have in common. Moreover, how may one document the exceptions, or grasp the idiosyncratic choices of the individual translator, if one does not first establish the norms in the target system and the tendencies inherent in translation behaviour?

There is an element of truth in this observation, but the fact remains that current descriptive-empirical approaches over-emphasize the role of norm-governed or patterned behaviour. As a result, it is undeniable that they document "the conformity, not the exceptions" (Gentzler 1993: 133) precisely because they are concerned with patterned regularities and "the discovery of abstract laws" (Pym 1998: 123). It may well be that translators worldwide tend to be conservative; but the law of conservatism remains purely abstract if we do not constantly apply it to a myriad of - sometimes highly creative - human translators living in historically determined circumstances.

An obstacle on the path towards methodological eclecticism, however, is not only the a-historical interest in laws and universals. In fact, descriptive empiricists are also concerned with the cultural functions of translation and tend to correlate textual and extra-textual features, which clearly entails a historical perspective (Hermans 1999: 39). Yet when it comes to devising historical studies, descriptive-empiricists focus on the sociological (the power of institutions, the collective or social forces behind norms), which is detrimental to understanding the individual (or text-specific) dimension of historical research. For example, Delabastita, who subscribes to descriptive translation studies, advocates "a historical and norm-governed concept" (1994: 241) of translation - where the two adjectives seem inextricably linked - and therefore focuses on the study of patterned behaviour in a corpus of target texts rather than on typical choices in one or more target texts.

Descriptivist empiricists should enhance the explanatory power of their historical research. Individual translators are bearers of social meanings, but some of their interventions may be purely personal or rooted in specific aspects of the target tradition. Translators are not simply in the grip of powerful translation and poetic norms; they may have their own ideological agendas. In this respect Pym's observation that Toury's approach, which emphasizes "stability rather than change", overlooks conflict and tension in translation, remains pertinent (1998: 115). No
doubt there is both consensus and conflict in target traditions. Translation research should consider change, which tends to be norm-breaking, and shifting power relationships, including the question of "who establishes and retains norms" (ibid.). Interestingly, the analogy with linguistics is, again, revealing. Cameron (1995: 17), too, believes that conflict should be the object of serious consideration: "conflict renders visible the processes of norm-making and norm-breaking, bringing into the open the arguments that surround rules".

In my research I have focused on an extremely successful translator, H. F. Cary (1792-1844), who operated with coeval norms (Crisafulli 1996, 1997, 1999). It is not surprising that I have tended to subscribe to a predominantly rule-governed view of translation: Cary adhered to mainstream translation practice. I now believe that one should consider disruptive or innovative translators, too. But even if one deals with mainstream translators, it is possible to escape an exclusively norm-governed view of translation. If we intend to pursue methodological eclecticism, the solution lies not only in considering conflict and change, but also in focusing on types of translation behaviour ('strategic interventions'), which are not norm-governed or patterned, even though by no means unaccountable or erratic. In other words, we should consider the translator's personal/ideological dimension.

4. **Systematic semiotics**

The notion of patterned, norm-governed behaviour, important as it is, cannot in itself throw maximum light on a target text's features. I suggest we employ the term 'systematic semiotics', which harmonizes systematic behaviour (translation strategies are patterned regularities) with the semiotic nature of the translator's choices. The mere act of employing a descriptive framework implies that there are identifiable linguistic features in the source text, which may or may not be transferred to the target text. These may be subjected to a (rational) systematic semiotics, that is, formal features may be subsumed into descriptive categories ('strategies'). Consider, for example, the categories 'zero translation' and 'bowdlerization', which consist in the elimination of tangible features in the source text. Clearly, the analysis of the translator's ideological-personal choices requires a sophisticated hermeneutic approach that does not consider patterns or regularities.

Whereas linguistics tends to be concerned with communities rather than individual speakers, descriptive translation studies should be concerned with both the collective (tendencies of behaviour) and the human translator. Descriptive translation studies overlap with linguistics and literary criticism and historical studies. Linguists may indeed discard atypical occurrences as idiosyncratic, that is, as irrelevant to the establishment of patterns of language use, but translation scholars cannot avoid considering atypical (that is, individual) choices if their aim is to understand the human translator. A close analysis of exceptions — including instances of alleged 'mistranslations' — might reveal that they are, in fact, strategic interventions revealing certain (unexpected) aspects of the target text's meaning. Although atypical choices occurring only at specific points of the target text are not norm-governed, they may be extremely significant. Even a single instance may shed light on the translator's outlook.

This is not to belittle the notion of typicality, which underpins norms and universals. Corpus-based empirical investigations have shown that translation behaviour is highly patterned, and certainly not random. In an eclectic approach the observations of descriptivists-empiricists and translation historians may be harmonized. Lefevere, who was keen on studying the patterned regularities in the target text, stressed the 'importance of the direct intervention in translation' (1992: 96-7). Perhaps Lefevere was not entirely successful in reaching a compromise between the collective and the individual, but at least he put the human translator at the top of his agenda.

5. **Towards an eclectic methodology of translation description**

An eclectic approach to textual analysis should describe the interrelationships between trans-individual (socio-cultural, historical and universal) and individual (the 'human element') factors in translation. This requires translation scholars to harmonize quantitative and qualitative types of research. Quantitative, corpus-based research, which is typical of descriptive-empiricist approaches, yields tendencies or regularities of translation behaviour (whether historically determined or universal). These may throw light on a number of strategies used by translators: the universal 'explication-disambiguation' has enabled me to account for (rather than criticize) H. F. Cary's frequent explanatory interpolations in his rewriting of the *Comedy* (see Crisafulli 1996) (there are still scholars who take translators to task for adding to the target text). Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, is based on a critical-interpretative approach to the textual evidence. It attempts to link the translator's interventions with the coeval historical context, and aims at revealing the individual translator's politico-ideological outlook.

I suggest a model of textual analysis which considers the target text from three perspectives: poetics, translation-specific factors and ideology. The model, which is particularly suited to the analysis of translations produced before the twentieth century, is deeply influenced by Lefevere's (1992) conception of the role of ideology and poetics in literary translation, by Venuti's (1995) studies on the canon of fluency in the Anglo-American tradition, and by Baker's (1993, 1996) and Toury's (1995) theorizing on laws and universals of translation.

**Towards a systematic semiotics of the target (literary) text**

(I) Some categories of textual analysis revealing norm-governed/patterned behaviour
• Poetic strategies:
  (1) bowdlerization (are there instances of coarse language in the source text which the translator has ‘censored’?);
  (2) euphemism (is there a tendency to tone down the source text’s style?);
  (3) poeticizing (e.g. does the translator consistently use poetic markers/poeticisms? What kind of poetic repertoire does s/he draw from?);
  (4) archaizing (is the target text enveloped in an archaic patina – that is, standard archaic usage and/or archaic poeticisms?);
  (5) zero translation (are there features/parts of the source text which are omitted in the target text?)

Most poetic strategies can be accounted for in terms of translation norms and literary values (e.g. the norm prescribing that the translation of an epic poem like Dante’s Comedy requires an elevated literary style) and/or in terms of a historically determined and culture-specific canon (such as the strategies of transparency and fluency in the Anglo-American tradition).

• Translation strategies:
  (1) Readability (by what means does the translator achieve fluency?). This strategy is accountable in terms of the historically determined canon of transparency-fluency and Touvy’s trans-individual law of translation whereby translators tend to simplify the original’s textual make-up.
  (2) Clarification and explicitation (are there any explanatory interpolations, paraphrases, etc. in the target text?): this seems to be a universal feature of translation (trans-individual and a-historical), but surely there must be some variation from one translator to another when it comes to the pervasiveness of these strategies.
  (3) Generalized compensation, which is a form of patterned behaviour in the target text (does the translator consistently make intensifying lexical additions throughout the target text, e.g. in order to compensate for the loss of the original rhetorical strength?)

(II) Some categories of textual analysis revealing the translator’s outlook: the translator’s (political, ideological) interventions in the target text
  (1) Textual criticism (does the translator intervene in paratexts and discuss alternative textual variants?). This category describes one possible type of personal interventions – those reflecting the translator’s hermeneutics or translation theory (e.g. a translator may want to show the elusive nature of translation and thus take on the function of textual critic).
  (2) ‘Mistranslation’ (are there any instances of ‘mistranslation’ which could be explained in terms of the translator’s outlook or political agenda?)
  (3) Manipulations (does the translator manipulate certain parts of the source text for politico-ideological reasons?)

(4) Personal-ideological interventions (does the translator put forward a non-manipulative politico-ideological reading which, however legitimate, reveals his/her distinctive outlook?)

(III) Types of analysis (see Table 1): quantitative analysis for regularities of behaviour – translation strategies reflecting norms, canons, universals; and the desire to compensate consistently throughout the target text; qualitative analysis for politico-ideological interventions, acts of textual criticism and instances of compensation other than generalized. Generalized compensation is a strategy attempting to make up for the loss of a recurrent, stylistic feature of the source text. Conversely, displaced and contingent types of compensation occur in specific parts of the target text. Instances of displaced and contingent compensation are linked to specific losses (e.g. the loss of a pun in the source text) and may be consistent with interventions motivated by the translator’s poetics and/or ideology (see Harvey 1995 and Crisafulli 1996).

As Hermans rightly argues, existing models of translation description do not provide “much guidance as to which passages to select for detailed study” (1999: 70). Clearly, when one deals with qualitative analysis “interpretation and judgment” (ibid.)

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<th>Patterned regularities</th>
<th>Strategic interventions</th>
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<td>Realized in the target text’s textual strategies, which may be compared with tendencies observed in corpora of translated texts.</td>
<td>Realized in sensitive parts of the target text. Strategic interventions reveal the translator’s outlook.</td>
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<td>Focus on trans-individual factors and generalized textual features</td>
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<td>Translation norms</td>
<td>Ideological interventions; manipulations</td>
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<td>Translation canons</td>
<td>Acts of textual criticism</td>
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<td>Universal/laws of translation behaviour</td>
<td>Choices of a personal nature; ‘mistranslations’</td>
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<td>Generalized features of the target text (e.g. generalized compensation)</td>
<td>Interventions located at specific parts of the target text (e.g. displaced and contingent compensation)</td>
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Table 1: Types of investigation and analyses that characterize, respectively, the search for patterned regularities in the target text and the study of the translator’s personal/ideological interventions.

are of the utmost importance. When we select passages for textual analysis, we operate on the assumption that they will yield interesting observations. The very process of selecting data – like the ensuing textual analysis itself – is a complex interpretative act. Therefore, it is simply not possible to lay down hard-and-fast rules for correct qualitative analyses of all target texts. We can only go some way towards developing a methodology facilitating the researcher’s task. For example,
the translation scholar should consider the translator’s biography, his/her declarations of intent and whatever may throw light on his/her background. One should then proceed on the assumption that the translator’s outlook will surface at specific sensitive points of the target text (including paratexts). This is the crucial question to qualitative analysis: are there any sensitive parts in the source text that the translator is likely to manipulate, modify or interpret in a specific way, given his/her outlook?

The distinction between poetic and translation strategies cannot be absolute. We can only tentatively categorize the data according to an alleged predominant function. Moreover, the very distinction between trans-individual factors (such as norms) and ‘the human translator’ is sometimes relative. Even poetic strategies reveal something about the individual translator: his/her unique response to social/cultural pressures or norms; his/her choice of diction within the range of available, that is, permitted options (the translator may be allowed to archate or modernize the target text). Translators are not simply in the grip of overpowering norms, canons, etc., which are mechanically reflected in the target text. They participate in an intellectual-cultural milieu and their choices have to be set within a context, but they also have their own distinctive personalities. Certain interventions in the target text may be highly original or even unique; and, more importantly, single choices may be extremely significant from a politico-ideological point of view.

Clearly, we cannot discard the idea of meaningful patterns when it comes to categorizing all the features in the target text, but I prefer the term ‘consistency’ when it comes to interventions of an ideological or personal nature, which occur only at specific sensitive points of the target text. If a few choices on the ideological axis are consistent with a certain hypothesis (e.g., a Protestant translator could produce a Protestant-inspired reading of Dante’s *Comedy*), we may employ a concept like ‘ideological agenda’ to subsume them. The qualitative analysis of ideological interventions in particular will always be laden with the scholar’s own politico-ideological beliefs.

6. Conclusions: the critical task of translation theory

Although existing descriptive-empirical models are not totally inadequate, they cannot throw maximum light on the target text without the contribution of historical and critical-interpretative approaches. Toury and Baker have grasped the importance of empiricism – the basic epistemological principle underlying descriptive research in translation – but their approach is far from uncontroversial. Their emphasis on patterned regularities fails adequately to account for all the phenomena occurring in the translation process.

According to Baker, descriptive translation studies should provide the methodology and research procedures “to enable the findings of individual descriptive studies to be expressed in terms of generalizations about translation behaviour” (1993: 241).

This is an important goal, but it neglects crucial dimensions of translation research. Baker emphasizes the ancillary role of case studies, their usefulness being judged in terms of the contribution they make to uncovering regularities or tendencies. As I have repeatedly pointed out, descriptive translation studies must also provide the methodological principles enabling scholars to study the interrelationship between patterned translation behaviour and the translator’s personal choices.

The goal of descriptive translation studies is not only to discover scientific laws with predictive power but also to understand the significance of what I have termed ‘text-specific or strategic (personal) interventions’, which can reveal a great deal about the human translator. Only by harmonizing system-oriented and critical-interpretative thinking will descriptive translation studies be able to account for the widest range of factors that have a bearing on the target text.

The observations made so far imply that we must broaden the goals of descriptive translation studies. As Hermans points out, empirical-descriptive approaches have focused on “questions surrounding the production, reception and historical impact of translation – especially literary translation” (1999: 44). This is why descriptivist empiricists have developed a sociology of translation, thereby neglecting important dimensions such as “the philosophy of translation, or the mental and cognitive operations of the translation process itself” (ibid.). I agree with Hermans (1999: 147) that translation studies as a whole should operate at three interconnected levels: *theory* (which includes the hermeneutics of translation), *analysis* (by which I mean textual analysis) and *history* (translation scholars should strive to maintain a historical orientation).

In fact, one of the major critical tasks of translation studies as a whole “consists in theorizing the historical contingency of different modes and uses of translation” (Hermans 1999: 147). This task requires scholars to focus on the interpretative operations characterizing the translation process. If scholars of a descriptivist-empiricist persuasion aim at understanding translation as a cultural and historical phenomenon, the issue of interpretation should become their central concern. Descriptive translation studies need to develop a hermeneutics of translation and an epistemology (and this is, again, a methodological task) which, besides being compatible with empiricism, has explanatory – *not only* predictive – power. But this should be the object of another article.
References


Crisafulli: The Quest for an Eclectic Methodology