

# A personal archaeology: Silence, action!

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I am not usually keen on ego-trips but I welcome the invitation by *MeTI* because I realize how personal and collective moves can sometimes be really and surprisingly intertwined. The following storytelling might pretend to be something between a microhistory and a kind of historiography of Translation Studies (TS). But a few elements must be mentioned right away. First, the impact of technology in the last 50 years, in teaching, translation, terminology, interpreting, management, administration: I don't know how many times I had to get acquainted with a new software (translation memory, speech recognition, MT, etc.) and get used to different supports (from floppy disks, diskettes, memory sticks... to clouds). The frequent change of e-tools was also a way to develop a critical thinking. Secondly, I could not guess that different choices made during my university studies would lead me later to certain paths. For instance, the reading of McLuhan in the comparative literature course, the topic of my MA thesis (1973) dealing with a British poet (John Clare, 1793–1864) with some of my own translations, although I was not an Anglicist but got support from Pierre Leyris who translated Clare in 1969, and, last but not least, the study of the interactions between kids and adults in a library for my doctoral dissertation (1981–1986). Let's start the journey, not a chronological one.

## A set of paradoxes

I have always been surprised and fascinated by the paradoxes, the tensions of translation, source of transgression and conservatism, and the diversity of approaches. Be that as it may, functions of translations and translators are continuously ambiguous: subjugating, domesticating or in contrast, resisting and relieving. In fact, one can translate for the industry working with GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) and interpret for a Green activist; one can interpret for a policeman who is trying to deport a refugee and translate papers which acknowledge an immigrant as a legal worker; one can translate within a highly competitive environment and within a network of solidarity, as Translators without Borders. On the other hand, Translation Studies (TS) has certainly increased its import as a field of investigation, partly because of the diversity of the practices which have been analysed and partly because of its institutionalisation - for instance there are today more than 130 journals in TS against less than five in the seventies. TS has also gone through many turns in the last 40 years – the cultural, ideological, psycho-linguistic, semiotic, cognitive, sociological, technological turns just to name a few.

Indeed, TS is a set of paradoxes.

- Paradox between the object of study which is very often seen as homogeneous and the socio-professional categorization of translators (freelancers, in-house translators in a corporation or an international organisation, and employees working for and with the language industries) and interpreters (conference interpreters, court interpreters, community interpreters, and interpreters in sign language) – and let's not forget the volunteers, fans and amateurs of crowdsourcing, activists, and people who today use Machine Translation (MT) and AI (Artificial Intelligence). Perhaps we should include all the different status of translators. This is a bit like the medical profession, which needs surgeons, nurses, ambulance employees, first-aid workers and include today high-tech medicine and the so-called alternative medicines (acupuncture, homeopathy, Chinese energetic medicine, etc.).
- The paradox of the academics who can be both respondents (translators) and researchers (translation scholars), a paradox which is increased by the interdisciplinarity: we borrow from pragmatics, discourse analysis,

literature, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, cognitive psychology, ethnography and so on and so forth.

- The paradox of the institutionalization, since on the one hand we have quite a number of publications and on the other hand a lack of scholars able to supervise dissertations, get funding, carry out international projects, and legitimize the status of TS, still too often attached to departments of languages, linguistics or literature.
- The last paradox worth mentioning now: the use of a lingua franca. How can a community supposed to be open to differences and cultural diversity, demand, with no criticism, that members from Japan, Brazil, and Iran speak and write in a single language?

From all these paradoxes, one cannot conclude that TS is based on a strong consensus in its approaches and its contradictions. Such a consensus can only be temporary, unstable and always in need of a definition. This is maybe, paradoxically, a sign of vitality.

## The Social Dimension of translation

In the 70's, translation was considered either as a linguistic equation, transcoding, or as a psycho-educational way of language learning. Most of the teachers in translation then had training in linguistics or in literature.

In the 80's, functionalist and descriptive approaches emerged – concerned about functions and types of texts to be translated, and norms and strategies regulating the work. Translation is then seen as a communication embedded in a historical and socio-cultural situation. It is a solution to problems of international and multilingual communication – among other possible solutions, such as language learning, passive bilingualism, the use of an artificial or natural lingua franca, without forgetting non-cooperative solutions such as building walls, ethnocide and genocide.

My training in linguistics has allowed me to go beyond the conceptualisation of language as only a formal system and comprehend language practices, sociolinguistic usages, and discourse as negotiation of meaning and parameters lying at the very heart of our interactions. Discourse analysis, conversational analysis, and analyses of code switching in bilingual settings have also helped me to question roles and status of translators and interpreters.

Therefore, my questioning on retranslation, pseudo-translation and any form of inter- and intra-lingual reformulation, or rewording is justified. The need to question the main concept of TS then becomes apparent (but I did not realize it completely at that time even though the metalanguage of any science was always a trouble for me). I never forgot Camus' claim: "mal nommer un objet, c'est ajouter au malheur de ce monde" (To name things wrongly is to add to the misfortune of this world)<sup>1</sup> - what all authoritarian leaders know, from Hitler to Trump: first of all, manipulate the language so you can hypnotize people and put them on your side.

Already in 1976, terminology was part of our curriculum – the first course in Europe which was to be developed after I had a long stay in the European Parliament (Luxembourg) where I created a multilingual glossary on acid rains. At the end of August 1984, in one of the new luxurious buildings in Luxemburg, I was asked to sum up a conference on terminology and technological transfer, in front of an elderly scholarly audience: I could be only the devil's advocate. That was both a frightening and a positive event, because the main organizer trusted me. I have never forgot his invitation.

Thinking of translation as action, with a network of actors, reinforces then my sociological orientation. I was and I am convinced that the status of translators, their role, will change only if we shed light on their functions in societies, yesterday and today, rather than investigating only their psycho-cognitive mechanisms. Hence, for instance, the introduction of a course entitled "socio-translation" at the end of the 80's in order to study more systematically the factors and actors that determine the translation markets, the working conditions which affect the outputs (we hardly talked about quality at that time), and the translation policies (rarely explicit) in corporations and administrations.

Hence also, the proposals around 1987 for a socio-terminology, able to get terminology back on its feet again, the dominant theory being then unable to explain or to help in creating and disseminating new terms while the world was becoming more globalised.

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is very often used, in different forms. It is formulated in a critical review (1944) about Bruce Parain's philosophy, reprinted in *Essais* (1965), La Pléiade.

The 80–90’s went through a theoretical and methodological boom. Today, we are facing a kind of “break” following a rapid and diversified accumulation of hypotheses, models, and prefiguring, anticipating with no doubts a period of experiments, surveys, checks to validate concepts, and principles.

Two other domains have fed my own evolution.

### Audio-Visual Translation (AVT) and multimodality

The introduction of AVT in TS and in curricula is not an accident, even if the centennial anniversary of cinema (1995) has been a welcome sign to make people aware of the importance of AV products in the cultural transfers, of the possible role of subtitles in the development of our reading skills and for language learning. How did I dare to write an email to the Council of Europe willing to organize events for the anniversary but with no reference at all to translation, although granting the production and distribution of films through Eurimages (European Cinema Support Fund, launched in 1989)? The positive reply came as a surprise: Who could bother about the complaint and the wish of a young scholar? I must thank here the Council, YLE (the public Finnish Broadcasting Company), UNESCO, and the FIT (Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs), all of which have supported financially and logistically the first international conference held in Strasbourg (22–24.6.1995) on “Audiovisual Communications and Language Transfer”, in the premises of the Council of Europe. Since then, AVT has followed a long road – from a very marginal position in TS (some scholars at that time were even convinced that AVT was not translation) to a key position, inviting TS to revisit some of its key concepts. Between the tight deadline to co-subtitle a Finnish documentary into French for the bilingual TV channel Arte and the subtitling of a film as *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) full of allusions, puns, humour..., there were hard lessons to learn.

The technological changes, promoting for instance surtitling, audio-description for the blind and the partially sighted,<sup>2</sup> and also the legal constraints

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<sup>2</sup> How to forget my first audio-description of the film *Dead Poets Society* (1989)? What does “watching” mean?

of accessibility, stimulating for instance the development of intra-lingual subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing have quickly disturbed our first efforts. Moreover, the terrific progress in multimedia, with online and offline products and services, has encouraged thinking about potential convergences in translating all those different multimodal, multi-semiotic documents – the focus of two European projects (2009–2012 and 2011–2014).

Between the time when I organised for two years in my hometown, shows of films archives and underground films,<sup>3</sup> when I worked with J.L. Godard (1969–1970) while video was still in its infancy, but a promising tool for people speech, and the time when localising help documents, educative video-clips could not be ignored any longer, the correspondence between translation and literature had become rapidly outdated.

AVT as the localisation of software, websites and videogames disturb a number of well-established concepts in TS, such as the concepts of text, authorship, meaning and the distinction between oral and written codes. AVT and localisation inform not only the impact of technology on our ways of communicating but also the changes of paradigm in our way of conceptualizing translation. A full media history of translation remains to be written. Nevertheless, the way to multimodality was opened to me step by step since translation technical texts had graphs, tables, illustrations to be transferred, liaison interpreting (in meetings, fairs, negotiations) offered a lot about non-verbal signs, and AVT refers on multiple and various signs making meaning of the whole performance. My dissertation was far away but made me so much aware of the NV composition of any communication, with or without foreign partners.

## Challenges of transmission of knowledge and expertise

Since 1973, I have had many opportunities to discuss training and translation. Between a view perhaps too limited to a single language transfer and a more inclusive view – with a more carefully considered contextualisation,

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<sup>3</sup> Nothing then was digital. Taking care of the shows was a physical work – from designing manually posters to the transport of the heavy reels and the use of a dangerous carbon-arc lamp projector, with incandescent lighting.

the road has not always been straight. I must here pay tribute to the head of the Institute of Languages (Turun Kieli-Instituutti), who convinced me to stay in Turku, rather than to leave for Canada, Hong-Kong and return to France, and also to another teacher who introduced the first “machines” (Minitel and terminological data bases) in our training.

Administrative tasks have weighted on my thoughts and decisions: How in fact can one ignore financial and institutional aspects when you must define orientations and objectives of a curriculum? The reforms in 1981 (integration into the university) and in 2005 (with the Bolognese sauce) have allowed the calling into question of our training and the elaboration of new contents, progression of studies, a new methodology, the use of electronic tools, and the impacts of certain courses.

Moreover, participation in projects such as POSI (connecting the training of translators and the job market for the first time), the European Platform in Translation (1995–1999), or the Thematic Network in Translation within the Socrates programme (1997–1999) have helped me to understand the diversity of the training programmes, and the extent of the problems and contradictions in those programmes.

Whatever the level of commitment (local or European), and wherever the place of discussion (seminars, conferences, publications) and whoever were the interlocutors and representatives (young teachers, professors, professional translators, decision-makers from universities or ministries), I learnt not to trust blindly in buzzwords such as efficiency, performance, flexibility, compatibility, and to make real effort to distinguish between wishful thinking, declamatory and prescriptive speeches and thinking taking into account ambitions and human/technological/ financial resources.

I learnt to bring to light disciplinary borders, the conservative attitudes of institutions, remembering how ideas were circulating in the 12–13<sup>th</sup> c. thanks to travelling monks, or in the 17–18<sup>th</sup> c. thanks to Royal Academies and salons, and how “voluntary un-subservience”, the “critical unruliness” dear to M. Foucault (1990) were a pre-requirement for research and creativity. How to question the questioning, to look at far and also very near, around oneself in order not to agree with easy evidence and not to become a power with no bold innovation.

Working here and there, for research, the training of trainers, organisation of conferences and as general editor of a series in TS, I also learnt how difficult it can be to work with global teams, multilateral networking, when facing timelines, various expectations and commitments, and geographical and cultural divides.

Since the mid-90's, I can say that training highly qualified translators has deeply changed, at least in certain universities – both under the pressure of technology and the diversity of the translation jobs (translators, localisers, co-writers, technical writers, trans-editors, etc.).

With the EMT (European Master's in translation), launched in 2007, I was lucky enough, with many others, to implement new requirements, explicit competences in training programmes and to develop a network much more stimulating and fruitful than the sole logic of competition.

### Impossible predictions

Entrepreneurial universities are increasingly replacing the Humboldtian model of higher education (from the 19th century), in which the focus was on research and studies, the aim for students was to become autonomous individuals and world citizens. Today, most of the universities, as instruments of the neoliberal corporate order, follow market-based rules: creating pressure on students, and with teachers and scholars supposed to be increasingly innovative, productive, and better in communication.

What is the impact of such a landscape on TS as a discipline? This cannot be the place and the time to retrace the history of this recent science, its internationalization, its institutionalization. A discipline is always part of an architecture of knowledge production that integrates and exceeds it at the same time. This means that TS, like any other discipline, is not from the outset a universal, permanent, static category. And above all, this says nothing about the nature of relations with other disciplines. Even internationalized, even with its turns and dizziness, TS is not uniform or stable: it is divided between a hyper-specialization, a compartmentalization that is the delight of publishers willing to edit new journals (*Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, *Digital Translation*, *Translation Cognition and Behavior*, *Translation in Society*) and a convergence that has difficulty finding its common denomi-

nators, about its polymorphic object, its presuppositions, its methodological orientations.

When translators worked in special fields (in pragmatic or Specialized translations) with texts, with their genre conventions, such as contracts, patents, articles, instructions and fictions, in circumscribed and recognized fields of expertise (economics, agriculture, defense, science, energy, machinery, literature etc.) and for specific needs, there did not seem to be insurmountable translation problems. Today, in the midst of an increasingly digitized world, the hegemony of English, there are various objects and practices of translation: is the term itself encompassing or a particular mode of transfer?

Today, transformations increasingly demand transversal approaches. As examples, we could mention climate change, sustainable development, artificial intelligence or gerontology. Obviously, the rapid changes in technology open up new priorities, new specializations, new bifurcations, which blur several borders. Against this backdrop, we should question whether further synergies should be created between different areas or whether the separation should be maintained between *Translation Studies*, *Adaptations Studies*, *Intercultural Studies*, *Transfer Studies*, *Media Studies*, *Knowledge Management*, *Internet Studies*, *Web Science*, *Globalisation Studies*, *Usability Studies*, *Accessibility Studies*, *Human-Computer Interaction Studies* and *Social Semiotics* just to name a few research domains which are in competition with TS (at least financial and institutional) and which also handle communication in its broad sense? This does not mean that TS should or has to integrate neighboring disciplines. All of them acknowledge the complexity of communications and behaviors and deal with them but, truly, they still tend to ignore translation (between languages and cultures), as if information, data, knowledge and documents could be delivered in seconds around the globe despite the language diversity without translations. Separated as academic subjects, although partially interrelated, these *studies* have in common the complexity of interactive communications and behavior but ignore or do not consider, except TS, linguistic diversity, language contact, cultural interference, translation and interpretation. Could we not envisage a transversal discipline capable of dealing with how groups, individuals, and cultures manage, value (or not), negotiate, and mean “differences” and connections?

The question is not to set boundaries to delineate a new, fixed, permanent category but to navigate through a substantial number of practices and data and find a relevant way to describe and understand them.

For the moment, TS still has to think about its “external” relations (with other disciplines and language industries) and its “internal” relations (or its co-operation with practitioners, professional or not and experts in various fields), think about the social reception of its work (towards translators, the general public, the media and publishers), think about its academic status (often fragile or weakened by other disciplines also in conflict with their disputed status, such as language studies and linguistics, which still seek to chaperone TS in various European countries, or comparative literature in the United States). TS must also think about its place in the current division of disciplines: its teaching remains confined to the Humanities while translation is also questioned in medicine, law, business, the social sciences and in the language industry.

## A spiral evolution

How should I conclude such a brief and surely simplistic and even maybe biased report? Today two major issues remain.

First of all, the need to rethink text-genres to be translated, to welcome new forms/types resulting from the transition from analogical to digital, from the linear and continuous verbal sequence to hypertext, from a finalised and stable text to a volatile, short-lived document which can be updated at any moment. The new ways of composing information categories and mapping semantic units, rather than structuring into paragraphs, sections and chapters, are not without consequences for the ways we read, understand, memorize... and translate.

Secondly, it is only recently I did discover the convergence between the different events I went through. We must accept not to see the full tapestry but only, and for a long time, the different threads which are woven little by little. But, and maybe more important, I would say to the younger researchers be daring, even a bit foolish; embrace boldness in your own journey and do not try to be always under control. Progress in knowledge is not continuously following a logical path, paying attention to your attention.

Accept your ignorance! As Alice in Wonderland said: “Anything is possible. You just have to know the wings”. Or, in other words, as Seneca wrote: “It is not because things are difficult that we don’t dare; it is because we don’t dare, they are difficult.”

The trajectory, recounted here and now, is just like a spiral: outgoing and constantly turning - but not in a circle. The spiral escapes the repetitive circle, breaks the routine and surroundings. Evolutionary, never closed, the spiral comes and goes from inside to outside. It brings together and disseminates. That is the feeling that I have after more than 40 years of experiences, doubts and advances.

## A personal archaeology: Silence, action!

### Abstract

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I intend to question a 40-year career in order to understand somewhat the archaeology of my directions. This way of looking – both retrospective and prospective – underscores how much luck I had to participate in both the emergence and the development of Translation Studies (TS).

### Keywords

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Audiovisual Translation, paradoxes, translation, Translation Studies, transmission

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