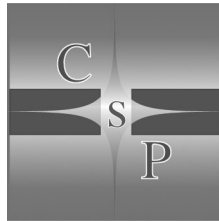


Across Boundaries

Across Boundaries
International Perspectives on Translation Studies

Edited by

Dorothy Kenny and Kyongjoo Ryou



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Kyongjoo Ryou

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INTRODUCTION

It is something of a cliché to say that translation involves ‘crossing boundaries’—linguistic, cultural, methodological, even disciplinary—yet leaving our home territory is such a vital and profound part of what translation scholars and interculturalists in general do, that there is no escaping the appropriateness of the metaphor. Leaving familiar territory to engage with other forms of seeing, knowing, speaking, and, sometimes, to seek harmony between different approaches, is also a noble and challenging pursuit, and it is fitting that we celebrate such intellectual journeys in this volume.

Indeed, this volume crosses borders in more ways than one. Most obviously, it was edited by a team located in Ireland and Korea, and its contributors are based in no fewer than twelve countries across the globe. When one takes into account the panel of referees who have read and commented on the papers it contains, the extent of international collaboration involved becomes even more obvious. Such collaboration is, of course, greatly facilitated by modern telecommunications technology, but the genesis of this volume actually lies in the face-to-face contacts made by contributors at the inaugural conference of the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) in Seoul in August 2004. That such gatherings remain a vital part of our dynamic field suggests that we will continue to cross geo-political boundaries for some time to come.

But what of the linguistic, cultural, methodological and disciplinary boundaries mentioned above? The contributors to this volume illustrate in many ways how such boundaries may be negotiated, permeated or even done away with altogether. The volume opens with **Judy Wakabayashi**’s reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of theory-driven and case-oriented approaches to comparative historiography—approaches that are, she admits, separated by an artificial boundary, one that serves methodological convenience rather than reflecting a real disjunction. In her contribution, she addresses the very real issues of what happens when Western scholars attempt to interpret non-Western cultures, the tension between universalising and particularising tendencies in comparative research, and the applicability of certain social science research methods to the humanities, to mention but a few of the facets covered in this rich paper. Like Wakabayashi, **Martha Cheung**, is also interested in comparative research, this time from the point of view of a scholar attempting to explain Chinese translation concepts to a non-Chinese readership. Again like

Wakabayashi, Cheung is acutely aware of the potential for translation that seeks to explain the foreign in familiar terms to negate real differences between cultures and traditions. She thus advocates experimentation with ‘thick translation’ (Appiah 2000; Hermans 2003), an approach that can be used ‘to achieve sharp delineation of differences and detailed characterization of similarities between the translation concepts of the source and target cultures whilst fully acknowledging the constructed...nature of the similarities and differences thus established.’

The two papers that start the second section in this volume call into question the boundary between the verbal and the visual in text, albeit in different ways. Based on case studies of three international magazine advertisement campaigns, **Ira Torresi** argues in favour of an approach to translation in which the verbal and the visual are inextricably linked in a semiotic whole, and where ‘every sign is there for the translator to use’. Likewise, **Nilce Pereira**, in her study of illustrations in translations into Brazilian Portuguese of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, shows how translation procedures and analytical categories normally applied to interlingual translation can also be applied to forms of interpretation that operate between semiotic systems, in this case between verbal and visual systems. Two further case studies look specifically at how linguistic and cultural boundaries are transcended or permeated in the context of early twentieth century translation in Japan: **Miki Sato** argues that, against a background of debate on the merits of literal versus free translation, Konosuke Hinatsu’s enduringly popular translation of Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* succeeded in harmonising European aesthetics with Japanese style. She also provides a fascinating glimpse of how orientalism can be enacted in the ‘East’, showing how Hinatsu drew on archaic Chinese to make his text foreign to itself, allowing his audience to experience a kind of ‘double exoticism’. Here, we see again the ineluctable cultural and linguistic influence of Chinese in East Asia, a theme that runs throughout a number of papers in the first half of this volume. **Emiko Okayama**, for her part, investigates how translation helped effect a profound linguistic change in Japanese, resulting in the increasingly common use of third person pronouns in the language. Okayama’s study is based on an electronic corpus of works by Natsume Soseki, and she provides ample evidence of the usefulness of corpus-processing tools in highlighting both synchronic variation and diachronic shift in language contact situations. **Stuart Campbell**, our final contributor to this second section, also uses an electronic corpus in his study, but this time to reveal less irenic tendencies in language use. Based on a linguistic analysis of newspaper articles published in Sydney newspapers between 2002 and 2003, Campbell argues that Australia’s print media presented a distorted model of the Arab World to its readership during this period, possibly influencing public opinion on the country’s participation in the war in Iraq.

Language, in this case, becomes the principal obstacle to our ability to transcend cultural boundaries.

The third section of this volume focuses on challenges in translator training and the use of translation technology. The section is opened by **Dorothy Kelly**'s paper on translator competence, which is considered in the particular context of current moves to harmonize higher education internationally, and especially within the proposed European Higher Education Area. Not only does the paper deal with cross-border harmonization, it also considers how intended outcomes and teaching and learning activities can be better aligned in translator training programmes. **Monika Smith** is also concerned with bridging gaps, in this case the gap between academic translation courses taught as part of a traditional language degree, and 'real-world' demands made of professional translators. Drawing on insights gleaned from a think-aloud study involving professional translators and language students, she argues that competence in certain areas of professional translation should be taught to language students, 'as they are likely to benefit language learners in general as much as future translators in particular.' **Mira Kim**'s paper builds a bridge between Halliday's systemic functional grammar and translation error analysis, and thus between theory and practice in translator training. Her empirical research is based on a detailed error analysis of student translations between English and Korean, a language to which systemic functional analyses have not been applied to any great extent in the past, and demonstrates one way in which translation teachers can give systematic feedback to their students. In his contribution, **Haroldo Quinteros** addresses the rise of the teaching of English as a foreign language at the expense of other foreign, and even some indigenous languages, in his native Chile. He takes issue with the argument that English is simply a convenient modern lingua franca, and draws on contemporary sociology and political science to argue that the dominance of English is a neo-imperialist imposition, and one in which the organs of the 'dependent' nation, Chile, have been complicit. Quinteros' paper will be of interest to all who are concerned about the maintenance of cultural and linguistic diversity, but it should ring particularly loud warning bells with translation scholars, for whom the contraction of competence in foreign languages other than English represents a very worrying trend. **Dorothy Kenny** takes a technological rather than linguistic perspective on what budding translators are taught. Her paper addresses the challenges that translation trainers face when teaching students about the use of translation memories (TMs) and parallel corpora. Given the sometimes incompatible priorities of higher education and the translation marketplace, as well as disquiet over the effects of TMs on translation quality, she asks how translator trainers are attempting to respond, if at all, to tensions that arise in the teaching of translation technology. In the final contribution to this volume, **Lynne Bowker**

and **Melissa Ehgoetz** deal with an even more controversial technology, machine translation (MT). Focusing again on an academic environment, this time involving staff users of translations at the University of Ottawa, they investigate the extent to which recipients are willing to compromise on quality, cost or speed of translation in evaluating the acceptability of MT output. In an age when translation practices are becoming increasingly differentiated by the level of technologization involved, such research will become increasingly important, as the need grows to educate not just translators, but also translation users, about modes of production and the ‘proper place of men and machines in language translation’ (Kay 1980).

We are greatly indebted to all our contributors, and to all others who have assisted in the production of this volume. Special thanks go to our panel of reviewers: Mona Baker, Karen Bennett, Francesca Billiani, Lynne Bowker, Leo Chan, Theo Hermans, John Kearns, Dorothy Kenny, Heinz Lechleiter, John Milton, Robert Neather, Eithne O’Connell, Minako O’Hagan, Riitta Oittinen, Kyongjoo Ryou, Stephanos Stephanides, Sebnam Susam-Sarajeva, and Chunshen Zhu; as well as colleagues in the Computer Services Department at Dublin City University, in particular Julian McGovern, Mahon McNamara and Paul Smith. We are also grateful to the following copyright holders (or their representatives) for giving us permission to reproduce adverts and illustrations in the second section of this volume: Andrea Turcato and Riccardo Barbieri of VicenzaFiere (Figure 3-1), Giada Barozzi of Maybelline Italia (Figures 3-2, 3-3, 3-4), Marcello Gelo of Elvive Italia (Figures 3-5, 3-6, 3-7), Editora Ática S.A. (Figures 4-2, 4-8, 4-9), Lila Galvão de Figueiredo (Figures 4-5, 4-11), and Claudia Scatamacchia (Figure 4-7).

Finally, we are immensely grateful to Sung Hee Kirk and her colleagues in the Sookmyung Centre for Translation and Interpreting Studies, for initiating this volume at the inaugural IATIS conference, in the wonderful environment of Sookmyung Women’s University, Seoul.

Dorothy Kenny (chief editor)
Kyongjoo Hong Ryou (editor)

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PART I
METHODS AND CONCEPTS

REFLECTIONS ON THEORY-DRIVEN AND CASE-ORIENTED APPROACHES TO COMPARATIVE TRANSLATION HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract

This is the third in a series of linked papers on comparative translation historiography. The first paper had a purely theoretical orientation, focusing on epistemological and methodological issues that arise when undertaking comparative translation history. The second paper adopted a bottom-up approach, attempting to distil broad similarities and specific differences from a case study comparing the translation history of the four countries in the Chinese cultural sphere. The present paper evaluates these two approaches, reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses in the light of each other and on the lessons learnt in the process of writing these two papers.

Keywords: comparative translation historiography, translation history, case studies

Introduction

This is a self-reflexive essay on methodology in translation history, the final piece in a triad of linked papers. “Toward a Model for Comparative Translation Historiography” (2004) was a purely theoretical paper, discussing the epistemological and methodological foundations for comparative translation history in general. “Translation in the East Asian Cultural Sphere—Shared Roots, Divergent Paths?” (2005) adopted a bottom-up approach focusing on China and those countries (Japan, Korea and Vietnam) that adopted Chinese characters as their script, used Classical Chinese as the most prestigious form of writing for many centuries, and were profoundly affected by Chinese culture. The present paper revisits these theory-driven and data-driven approaches, offering a ‘behind-the-scenes’ look at the problems encountered and the lessons learnt.¹ While the distinction between theory-driven and case study approaches is admittedly an artificial one, as case studies inevitably have a theoretical

grounding (and, ideally, should inform theories), no attempt was made in the theory-driven paper to flesh out the arguments with data, so the two papers differed fundamentally in their thrust and focus. Although this paper is based on one individual's experiences, sharing the challenges faced in working on the two earlier papers might highlight issues of broader relevance and prove instructive to other translation studies scholars.

The first section of the theory-driven paper was devoted to epistemological issues such as the nature and aims of comparative translation historiography, the projection of Western values and how to transcend this parochialism, and the tension between universally applicable concepts and particularistic approaches that celebrate localized differences. The section on methodological issues discussed potential comparative parameters and matters relating to corpus selection, temporal issues, continuity, change and progress, influence and reception, causality and analysis. Although the paper did not attempt to present a full-scale model of comparative translation historiography, it offered some desiderata in relation to such a model. The hypothesis in the case study of translation in China and its three cultural clients was that shared experiences led to key similarities in translation traditions in this region, but that local realities caused variations in the nature and timing of the evolution of these traditions. The findings of the case study are too complex to summarize here, but some of the implications of that methodological approach are examined below. In an attempt to 'experiment' with these two approaches, the two papers were written without direct reference to each other, although they were produced around the same time. Inevitably, however, some lessons filtered through, mainly from the theoretical paper to the case study. Nevertheless, it was not until writing the present paper that a conscious effort was made to reflect on the lessons of these contrasting approaches.

Increased awareness

Perhaps the most beneficial lesson from the theory-driven paper was an enhanced awareness of the complexity of and potential risks in comparative translation historiography. Reading about comparative historiography in other disciplines helped clarify the nature and aims of the comparative endeavour, heightened my awareness of the constructed nature of history, and made me more alert to possible biases.

The most obvious of these is Eurocentrism. As an Australian working in translation studies, still a very Eurocentric discipline, I am imbued with certain cultural notions and academic conventions. Moreover, the fact that I belong to none of the cultures examined in the case study raises questions about how this affects my position as historian and, more broadly, about the relative merits of

emic ('insider') and etic ('outsider') historiographies. Nevertheless, my long association with the Japanese language and culture and my work researching Japanese translation history mean I have been influenced by Japanese thinking in general and by Japanese views on translation and the Japanese culture of scholarship, so I am familiar with at least one of the cultures studied. Moreover, attempting to dissociate myself completely from Western thinking would not necessarily be desirable, even if it were possible. Familiarity with Western and Japanese cultures and scholarship better equips me as a 'translator' of East Asian history for Western audiences, as long as I remain alert to the potential biases highlighted in the theory-oriented paper. The outsider perspective carries certain advantages, helping avoid traps facing local historians, such as a possible over-emphasis on their own tradition (although there is no guarantee that I am immune to such a tendency in relation to Japan). Through my circumstantial 'membership' of the Western academy I happen to be able to present my research in the 'international' lingua franca (i.e., English) and in general accordance with the conventions of Western academic discourse, whereas the work of most of my Asian colleagues remains largely and undeservedly unknown in the West because of the language barrier. This same barrier also functions in the opposite direction—apart from Japanese, I lack facility in the languages examined in the case study, forcing me to depend on secondary sources and rendering me vulnerable to others' interpretations (it should be noted, however, that relying on secondary sources is common in comparative research).

The theoretical paper also drove home the need to 'watch my language'. The various homogenizing and West-centred² terms referring to the entities generally dubbed the *East* and *West* are problematic, and the historian's metalanguage can also be ill-defined (terms such as *influence*) or steeped with values that are not necessarily universal (terms such as *progress*). A related issue is the problematic adoption of English 'equivalents' for local translational phenomena, as this grafts on to these phenomena an interpretation not always accurate, obscuring differences that might be brought out by local labels (even if the use of such labels results in greater initial opacity).

One lesson brought home by the case study was the need for a willingness to have preconceptions based on translation in the West and Japan challenged by the situation in other Asian cultures. My hypotheses based on Japanese translation history were not wholly borne out by what I learnt about translation in Korea and Vietnam, and the circumstances surrounding translation in China were very different again, highlighting the dangers of treating 'East Asia' as a homogenous entity. The case study also underscored the fact that, despite real and important differences, translation in East Asia is not entirely irreconcilable with translation in the 'West'. When examining convergences and divergences,

the historian is faced with the dual temptations of (a) overemphasizing universal features and (b) essentializing local differences and claiming they are unique. When researching languages and cultures very different from those of the West, it is tempting to conclude that translation in these cultures also verges on the exceptional. Care must be taken that a search for differences does not overlook the perhaps even greater similarities.

The problem of the artificiality and subjectivity of constructs such as ‘the East’ was avoided by adopting the use of Chinese characters and Classical Chinese as criteria defining the region of study. Although using such a Sinocentric comparandum might conceivably lead to overlooking factors stemming from non-Chinese influences, in this region it would be impossible to miss the Western impact from the 16th century onward because of its magnitude, the differences in the nature of the texts subsequently translated, and the involvement of European figures in translation for the first time. Certain aspects of translation in this region are in fact best revealed by comparison with translation in the West—e.g., the relatively minor role of religious beliefs in shaping translation theory and practice in East Asia is perhaps not made obvious by studying this region in isolation. The most notable difference in comparison with the situation in the West is the fact that the use of Chinese characters and Classical Chinese as a kind of lingua franca obviated the need for conventional translation for much of East Asia’s history, except for in China itself. (Factors other than Chinese- and Western-related causes were less important in translation in this region than these two primary external forces.)

The case study demonstrated the impact of how ‘translation’ and related practices of re-enunciating texts are defined. For instance, excluding *kambun kundoku* (the practice of reading Chinese by using Japanese glosses; see Wakabayashi 1998 for a description) from the definition of translation in Japan would give the misleading impression that few foreign texts were rendered into Japanese before the arrival of Europeans. This example also highlights the fact that Toury’s notion (1980:39) of adopting target culture definitions of ‘translation’ fails to account for situations where there is in fact no consensus within the target culture on the ‘translational’ status of particular practices. The case study also highlighted how texts transcend cultural and linguistic borders in ways other than translation that might be equally influential—e.g., being read in the source language (Chinese), and *kambun kundoku*. Focusing on conventional translations alone fails to convey the full picture of cross-cultural transfers.

Hypotheses, variables and comparative parameters

The theoretical paper suggested many avenues of study that could be reformulated in terms of hypotheses. More work is needed, however, to produce

a model capable of suggesting research designs that are empirically and/or theoretically testable against alternatives. Beyond that, there is the broader question of whether testing hypotheses is feasible or even appropriate in comparative translation historiography. Whereas in the social sciences it is usual to disaggregate the phenomenon being studied into different variables, in translation studies there is no clear agreement on what constitutes variables; moreover, the act of specifying variables is itself driven by preconceptions. The question of appropriate measures of the variables is even more problematic, making it difficult to formulate and evaluate competing explanations in terms of variables. Moreover, historical phenomena cannot be manipulated experimentally. Ragin (1987:166) concludes that the variable-oriented approach is useful for “addressing abstract theoretical concerns ... , but the strategy is less compatible with the goal of interpreting or understanding specific cases or categories of cases.”

With the case study, my knowledge of Japanese translation history led to the formulation of initial hypotheses about translation in the other Chinese cultural satellites and to a preliminary selection of comparative parameters (i.e., an inductive approach). In turn this led to fact-finding aimed at refining and testing these hypotheses, albeit in a rather ad hoc fashion, and at modifying the parameters to represent the realities more adequately (i.e., a deductive approach). One drawback of the case study approach is that it is easy for findings to be influenced by the initial assumptions, with factors such as parameter and corpus choice being shaped by predetermined notions. Perhaps the only ‘solution’ to this is openness to having one’s preconceptions challenged by the facts. On the basis of my reading about translation in these four cultures I built up a mega-chart with a vertical column for each culture and horizontal rows consisting of parameters of potential relevance. This simple act of juxtaposition was surprisingly revealing. On the whole the parameters emerged naturally, shaped by the data rather than imposed on it, but the choice was also influenced by the hypotheses and my awareness of potential parameters through familiarity with translation studies. As information accumulated, the parameters were gradually refined and they were then grouped by related theme—e.g., linguistic and geographical ties; the identity of translators; training, patronage and censorship; text selection; relay translations; and the readership and market for translations. In the final stages some parameters were excluded because the data did not support their applicability in this region or because sufficient data were not available for all or most of the four cultures. Thus parameters relevant to only one or two cultures might have been overlooked, although arguably any *key* parameters would have been so self-evident that they would have been included.

Linguistic and practical constraints meant it was impossible to do sufficient studies of actual translations, which are clearly the prime source of information about translational practices and norms. Problems in identifying translation norms without textual studies or an examination of paratextual materials such as translators' prefaces made it difficult to use norms as a basis for comparison, except through secondary sources. Although many of the comparative parameters would also be applicable to other cultures, some that emerged as salient factors in East Asia are irrelevant in other contexts (e.g., those relating specifically to China, such as the script and the civil examination), highlighting the need to adapt the parameters for different studies. Even if the same parameters were found to be germane elsewhere, they might *combine* variously to produce dissimilar historical configurations, with individual parameters taking on different significance in those situations.

Although the theoretical paper critiqued the nation-state as a unit of comparison, using it as a convenient shorthand did not turn out to be especially problematic in this case study (a caveat was added about the changing nature over time of the entities to which the nation-state labels referred). The case study did underline the importance of alternative forms of community (regional identity in this case) and destroyed any lingering illusions that "national ... problems must have national causes" (Lorenz 1999:28). Chevrel (1995:12) has pointed out the importance of studying "non-national" spaces. Typically consisting of minorities, these spaces are not necessarily of minor importance, and in East Asia the space occupied by the minority educated in Classical Chinese simultaneously constituted the elite space, giving this 'minority' a disproportionate influence.

Braginsky (1996:7) regards genres as a more fruitful and less arbitrary comparative parameter than individual works (although he overlooks the possibility of a mismatch in genre labels and realities amongst different cultures). Likewise, the theoretical paper largely rejected the utility of comparing translations of single texts in different target cultures. The case study, however, highlighted the importance in this particular region of translations of some key Chinese and European source texts, suggesting that comparative studies of the reception of individual texts might be more productive than initially thought. Translation history typically focuses on translations of literature (because of their greater 'prestige' and because they tend to stand the test of time better than non-literary translations), but the case study highlighted the impact of non-fiction translations in East Asia and the need to investigate this category further (including the nature of just what has been regarded as 'literary' and 'non-literary' in these Asian cultures), particularly in relation to the impact of non-fiction translations on society rather than in terms of the translated texts themselves.

The case study did support the claim by D'hulst (2001) that the background of individual translators or theorists is of less relevance as a unit of comparison, although this was a somewhat self-fulfilling prediction, because from the outset the decision was made to focus on broad trends rather than individuals. Nevertheless, no translators or theorists emerged as having had significant influence *beyond* their own culture, unlike newly introduced concepts and genres, relay translations, translations of significant source texts, and so on.

Presenting the findings

The theory-driven paper noted different expository formats and intellectual schemes appropriate for comparative historiography. In the case study it was decided that a chronological ordering might obscure links, patterns and themes, but the resulting decision to adopt a thematic presentation based on the comparative parameters led to some repetition and possible confusion for readers unfamiliar with the history of this region. An alternative might be a country-by-country approach individually organized along chronological lines, followed by a comprehensive thematic overview, but again this would entail repetition.

Particularly when readers cannot be assumed to be familiar with the historical background, there is a temptation toward event-oriented description, potentially resulting in the overlooking of elements and relationships of greater importance than historical events. In this particular case study the need to provide substantiating information for readers less familiar with East Asian history diluted the focus on translation *per se* and gave rise to the risk of describing rather than interpreting and analyzing. For my own clarification I drew up a rough 10-page timeline of key translation-related events in these four countries, and at one point I considered including this as an appendix to aid readers and as a potential trigger for future research by highlighting periods of particular interest both within single traditions and across traditions. This seemingly straightforward exercise soon highlighted the complexities of the task, however, and the timeline was omitted from the final case study. As pointed out by Eva Hung (personal communication, Sept. 2004), decisions need to be made about the selection of timeline entries, where to draw the boundaries and on what basis, weightings (e.g., over time and in relation to different types of translation), and presentation (e.g., how to show continuity). The Japan segment of the timeline needs further refining on my part, and the production of single-country timelines by experts in translation history elsewhere in East Asia is a prerequisite to a collated timeline, as is agreement on essential categories and proportions. The next step would then be to make links across the four cultures to show the different times when similar events or stages in translation history

occurred, and perhaps to suggest causes, but again this requires further consideration as to how best to do this.

Analyzing the findings

Another aspect was how to capture the *changing* dynamics concisely and with balanced coverage. Many statements or conclusions are valid only for a particular culture or period, and space restrictions and lack of information meant that arriving at separate and more nuanced conclusions for each situation was not feasible. The sheer complexity of translation history was a (if not *the*) major challenge in the case study, making it difficult to delineate translation ‘traditions’ and trace their continuity. The ambitiousness of comparing translation history in four cultures meant that in the time available and with the limited capabilities of a single researcher it was not possible to unearth all the facts necessary for a comprehensive and balanced comparison. In researching the translation history of Vietnam, for instance, the only information readily available in English was incidental to works dealing with Vietnamese history or literature, rather than relating specifically to translation, so information on many issues of interest to translation scholars was simply not provided. (In East Asia the study of translation is still generally regarded as tangential to literary history, and much work needs to be done to establish it there as an independent discipline.) Nor was it possible to delve into the level of detail necessary to explore any heterogeneity *within* each of the four cultures. Conversely, it often seemed appropriate to omit supporting historical data that *was* available on certain topics because it might bog the analysis down in details and obscure the broader picture. Although these are practical rather than theoretical constraints, they are very real factors in large-scale projects. Drawing conclusions on the basis of incomplete or simplified information is obviously unsound and resulted in generalizations that made me uneasy, aware as I am of the remaining lacunae. Whereas the nature of comparison lends itself to seeking patterns and structure, perhaps at the expense of variation, case studies inherently tend toward particularization and, hence, a lack of relevance in other contexts. The question of the acceptable degree of generality before conclusions become meaningless perhaps calls for individual answers in particular studies.

The theoretical paper suggested that similarities across traditions might be (a) coincidental, (b) inherent in the nature of translation, or (c) the result of textual or intellectual transfers, while the case study came up with the more specific (albeit not new) finding that linguistic, social and political (regional and global) factors led to similarities (and differences) not accounted for by these three general causes. It also became clear from the case study that shared trends do not necessarily imply shared outcomes—e.g., the translation of Chinese

vernacular novels had different outcomes in Korea and Japan because of social factors. The theoretical paper also led to greater caution in attributing causality and believing others' claims about causality, and to a renewed realization that causal significance depends on context. As Ragin (1987:166) points out, "In some contexts a certain cause may be relevant to a given outcome; in others it may be unimportant; and in still others the absence of this condition may be causally significant". Sometimes (perhaps in most cases) the outcome is the result of a *combination* of causes, and sometimes different combinations produce the same outcome (a phenomenon known as multiple conjunctural causation). The ranking of causes (e.g., immediate causes, distant causes) perhaps relies more on researcher expertise than on methodological guidelines, but again the theoretical paper heightened awareness of potential problems in this respect and highlighted the fact that it is acceptable for case-oriented researchers to limit their study to a few carefully selected causal factors. Although this particular case study did attempt to identify all the *major* causal factors, the principle of parsimony³ suggests that a comprehensive approach is not always necessary.

If we accept the premise that phenomena should be explainable by reference to the suprasystem of which they are a part, then translation in individual cultures could be explained by reference to developments in the surrounding region. Yet it would be naïve to think this approach could explain *all* facets of translation in individual cultures, so a more detailed look at internal factors is also essential. Nevertheless, in a comparative study it is less important to explore the level of domestic detail required in a 'national' history, and instead the focus is on cross-cultural patterns of similarity and difference.

Dealing with contrary evidence is a perennial challenge for historians. It would be easy to gloss over differences that run counter to expectations and to manipulate facts that jeopardize one's hypotheses. Yet it is these very 'outliers' that might prove most fruitful, as they force the historian to look beyond the obvious explanation. In the social sciences causal attributions are "accepted as definitive only if all deviating cases are accounted for in some way" (Ragin 1987:51), but in the humanities this might be too rigorous an expectation except perhaps with small sets of data, and I would argue that in comparative translation historiography *probabilistic* relationships are acceptable as demonstrations of cause in large sets. Given the nature of the humanities, deviations are to be expected, and demanding exhaustiveness of proof would be more damaging than recognizing the reality of this messiness. Naturally, however, if the number of outliers is excessive, the hypothesis needs to be refined, categories further differentiated, or particularistic explanations adopted.

Although general historical periodization does not necessarily coincide with 'translation eras', the case study suggested that turning points in translation in

East Asia were in fact generally triggered by broad factors within the target society or on the international scene, rather than by changes directly driven by translators or theorists themselves, either as individuals or groups. In terms of periodization, it is not always essential to focus on the whole of recorded history, as valuable insights can of course also be gained from examining shorter periods, but it is important to remember that changing the ‘lens’ is likely to reveal a different picture. Including the *longue durée* period right back to the ‘start’ of translation history in this region revealed the subsequent impact of the adoption of Chinese script and Classical Chinese—a key factor that might have been overlooked if focusing only on shorter or more recent periods. (Conversely, of course, studies covering an extended period might overlook factors that are important within shorter timeframes.)

One possible analytical approach not considered until after completion of both papers was the use of Boolean algebra as a qualitative comparative method (see Ragin 1987). Boolean algebra addresses the conditions under which a certain outcome occurs, and it can be used in relation to events, processes and structures, suggesting its potential applicability to comparative historiography. Whereas the truth tables used in this method simply record the presence or absence of the outcome, the matrix used in preparing the case study included detailed information that was more helpful than a simple presence/absence approach when writing up the findings. A Boolean matrix might also not handle borderline and ambiguous cases adequately, but this approach merits further investigation.

Looking ahead

The case study highlighted a range of future needs. Of key importance is comprehensive individual histories as a prerequisite and support for comparative studies, which cannot readily explore the same level of detail. Also needed are translations of major theoretical texts from the different traditions (with English being the most likely target language because of its greater currency). Another prerequisite is catalogues of translations, which would facilitate objective analysis of certain aspects of translation history. Statistical distributions are useful for analyzing movements and currents (e.g., the number of translations in a particular period, of a particular genre, or of works by a particular author). Many aspects of translation history do not, however, lend themselves to a quantitative approach, and most translation historians probably lack training in empirical techniques such as sampling. This is a lack that some of the newly founded doctoral programs in translation studies might address. These programs could also usefully provide training in translation historiography and comparative translation historiography. Although there is potentially much to be

learnt from the methodology of other comparative disciplines, it is also vital to develop methods designed specifically for comparative translation history, or at least to identify and adopt parameters relevant to this field.

Reference is often made to the desirability of interdisciplinary or team efforts in research, and this project underscored just why this deserves more than mere lip service. It is simply not feasible for a single researcher to have an adequate command of the history and languages of several target cultures as well as of the theoretical and methodological foundations necessary for comparative studies. The obvious solution is collaboration, as teamwork provides additional regional and linguistic expertise and fresh theoretical and methodological insights. Errors in the draft of my case study that were pointed out by colleagues with expertise in the other cultures demonstrated just how vital it is to have broad input.⁴

Perhaps the most pressing need is to involve more scholars from ‘minor’ cultures in the study of translation history so as to broaden the informational base and offer new perspectives. Already there are moves in that direction (e.g., the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs’ triennial Asian Translators’ Forum, a series of workshops on translation East and West sponsored in London by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) Centre for Asian and African Literatures, and a planned series of conferences on Asian translation history that started with the Asian Translation Traditions conference in London in May 2004, co-sponsored by the AHRB Centre and the Research Centre for Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong). To capture the interest of scholars from these regions, the overall field of translation studies needs to continue increasing its visibility so as to make it a more attractive research option.

Conclusion

Although the focus of this paper has been on the methodological implications of theory-driven and case-oriented approaches to comparative translation historiography, certain theoretical implications also became apparent. Both studies supported polysystem theory’s focus on the contextual factors surrounding translation, and the case study substantiated Even-Zohar’s hypothesis (1990:46–48) that translation is more likely to move to a central position when literature in the target culture is ‘weak’, ‘peripheral’ or in ‘crisis’. It also bore out postcolonial theories highlighting the effect of power imbalances on translation (e.g., on text selection). In this instance China’s regional hegemony was largely cultural rather than military or political, and its neighbours actively *sought* this influence. The blurring between Chinese and the indigenous languages (at least in the written form; this blurring occurred not

only in the lack of awareness of a clear distinction but also in how Classical Chinese became a dominant mode of *original* writing) calls into question the source/target language dichotomy. The impact of script-related factors on translation has generally been accorded little attention by translation theorists, and nor have Western theories addressed East Asian realities such as the direct annotation of Chinese source texts instead of prototypical translation. The case study did reinforce the validity of Pym's suggestion (2001:282) to base translation histories on the *source* language (Chinese) or on networks linking sets of cultures. The almost total absence of known women translators and theorists in this region until the late 19th century means gender was largely 'irrelevant' in the case study (except, importantly, in this very absence of female involvement), but of potential interest is the fact that gendered metaphors of translation do not appear to be indigenous to this region. Much further research would be needed, however, to substantiate this very tentative suggestion.

The two studies highlighted the importance of a dialogue with the facts and the need for both general theories/models with predictive power and specific descriptions of local circumstances. Both approaches, however, tend to overlook human agency, a question that might best be addressed in national rather than comparative histories. Because purely theory-driven and case-oriented approaches both have limitations, a combined approach that incorporates their respective strengths and compensates for their weaknesses is desirable. As noted earlier, any case study operates on the basis of a theoretical approach, but not always at a conscious level, so it is important to be aware of the theoretical assumptions made and to examine them critically in the light of alternatives. Making the theoretical underpinnings of a case study more explicit can only be beneficial. Interaction between these complementary approaches allows the researcher to remain grounded in the cases while drawing on a theoretical basis for their interpretation and pushing theoretical principles to see where they might lead.

Although the theoretical paper did not present an actual model for comparative translation historiography, the groundwork laid there might contribute to future models and enrich forthcoming case studies, and much was learnt from considering these theoretical issues. Frankly, however, the practical difficulties of the data search and problems in weaving the narrative in the case study made the theoretical paper seem like so much academic angst at times. The case study also made me more sceptical of the claim by Snyder (1999:9) that a historical model should be able to "illumine every example and be able to explain why the variations occur in different situations". Finally, this whole two-part exercise made it abundantly clear that translation studies is still undeveloped in terms of a methodology for comparative historiography. Much work remains to be done in this embryonic branch of translation studies.

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Notes

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² China's position as the centre of the translation world in East Asia throughout most of history helps de-centre global translation history and highlights the relativity of notions such as 'centre' and 'periphery'.

³ An explanation citing a few variables is preferable to one citing many, as long as it is plausible and there is no significant loss in the proportion of explained variation (Ragin 1987:56).

⁴ I am grateful for feedback received from participants at the conference on Asian translation traditions in London in May 2004.

ON THICK TRANSLATION AS A MODE OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATION¹

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Abstract

The translation of concepts is intimately related to the translation of culture. Moreover, the translation of concepts brings out, in sharp relief, the politics and problematics of the representation/self-representation of culture. This paper explores such issues by focusing on an anthology of translation the author is compiling (Cheung 2006, forthcoming) – an anthology, in English translation, of Chinese discourse on translation, from ancient times to the Revolution of 1911. Specifically, this paper discusses the use and usefulness of what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls ‘thick translation’ in the rendering of Chinese translation concepts into English. I ask how useful ‘thick translation’ is as a strategy in bringing out the unique otherness of translation concepts such as ‘*xin*’, and how ‘thick translation’ can be practised in real terms? ‘*Xin*’ being a term deeply rooted in the Chinese cultural tradition, how thick can ‘thick translation’ be to give presence to such a tradition? How is culture to be represented in translation? Through an investigation of these and related questions, it is hoped that the discussion will have a theoretical relevance beyond the confines of Chinese-English translation.

Keywords: thick translation, representation, identity, anthology, translation of concepts, manoeuvre, faithfulness, fluency, Yan Fu, ‘*xin, da, ya*’

Introduction

Translation is a form of cultural representation. The translation of concepts is a particularly intricate aspect of cultural representation, as concepts are deeply rooted in culture. The different ways in which concepts are translated have important consequences for the source culture, consequences ranging from

exoticization to alienation to foreignization to sensitive re-presentation on one side of the spectrum and appropriation, domestication and hegemonic suppression of difference on the other. The translation of concepts therefore brings out, in sharp relief, the politics and problematics of the representation/self-representation of culture, and representation is intimately linked to the fashioning of identity. This paper explores the issues related to the question of representation by focusing on an anthology the author is compiling (Cheung 2006, forthcoming) – an anthology, in English translation, of Chinese discourse on translation, from ancient times to the Revolution of 1911, which marked the end of feudal rule in China. Specifically, this paper discusses the complexities of rendering Chinese translation concepts into English without severing their links with their home culture, so that they remain in a state like that described by a Chinese idiom referring to a broken lotus root – ‘root snapped, the silks still entwined’.

Conventionally, Chinese translation concepts are rendered into another language by the use of existent translation concepts in that language. The well-known Chinese translation concept of ‘*xin*’ (信), for example, is often translated into English as ‘faithful’. This facilitates the immediate perception of similarity. But the silks are no more. What differences there may be between ‘*xin*’ and ‘faithful’ are eliminated. And if, as is the case here, there are indeed differences because ‘*xin*’ and ‘faithful’ each has behind it a cultural tradition of its own, then the cultural tradition that has given rise to the concept of ‘*xin*’ is not represented at all. The root is snapped; nothing remains. There could be a worse scenario. Sometimes, an English translation concept has already acquired a special load of theoretical, ideological, and/or political meaning – as for example the concept of ‘fluency’ has in the hands of Lawrence Venuti (1998). If that concept (for example, ‘fluency’) is then used, unproblematically, to translate another Chinese translation concept (for example, the concept of ‘*da*’ 達), then the consequences are more serious. Not only is there an elimination of difference between the source language and target language concepts, the cultural tradition in which the source concept is embedded is, all of a sudden, re-presented, in a way which is thoroughly shaped by whatever political and theoretical weight of significance the target term has acquired. Whilst there is no denying that every act of translation is an act of interpretation, the result of this interpretive decision is a kind of preemptive epistemological closure which discourages, rather than stimulates, any genuine interest in the Other which a monolingual reader might have.

Thick translation – its genealogy

The question of how translation concepts are to be translated so that an informed understanding of the Other can be achieved is, as far as I know, first highlighted by Theo Hermans.² In his paper ‘Cross-cultural translation studies as thick translation’ (2003), Hermans puts forward Kwame Anthony Appiah’s notion of ‘thick translation’ and attempts to develop it into a mode of practice designed to resist the appropriation of the Other through translation. Since the anthology I am working on abounds in translation concepts, and since over ninety percent of the texts included in the anthology are translated into English for the first time, I would like to explore further the notion of ‘thick translation’ even though my concern is with self-representation rather than representation of the Other.

But first, a summary account of the genealogy of the term ‘thick translation’. Hermans borrowed the term from Appiah, who invented the expression as a variation of the term ‘thick description’ popularized by the ethnographer Clifford Geertz, who in turn borrowed it, with a twist (as he says) from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle.

Ryle the philosopher is interested in ‘the thinking of thought’. His famous question, of how two boys who are rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes ought to be described, and the array of interpretive possibilities listed for our consideration—possibilities of increasing interpretive sophistication starting from winking, twitching, to parodying a wink, to rehearsing a wink, to parodying the rehearsing of a wink, to rehearsing the parodying of a wink, and so on—are taken by Geertz to be a neat philosopher’s story. The lesson: beware of the sweep of abstraction. Beware, in other words, of thin descriptions. With reference to the above example, describing the two boys as both contracting the eyelids of their right eyes would be an example of thin description while thick description would seek to articulate the ‘immense though unphotographable differences’ between, for example, a wink and a twitch, and all the other interpretive possibilities a describer can imagine (Ryle 1971:480).

Geertz applies Ryle’s insight to ethnographical work, with a different emphasis. He uses ‘thick description’ as a label for the mode of engagement an ethnographer should be committed to in his/her attempt to observe, understand, interpret, describe, and ‘inscribe’ (to use Geertz’s own word) another culture in writing (Geertz 1973:19). It is a mode of engagement which seeks to guard against bias, especially ethnocentric bias. It stresses the establishing of fine distinctions (Geertz 1973:25; Hermans 2003: 386-7) as the basis upon which to make guesses (educated as opposed to careless guesses) at meanings that contribute to our knowledge of a culture, of cultures, and, beyond that, to our general knowledge of ‘the role of culture in human life’ (Geertz 1973: 27). But