Interview on current issues in Translation Studies

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Email interview for *Fedorov Readings*, Institute of Translation and Interpretation, St Petersburg State University. The questions were sent by Andrey Achkasov.

1. Could you describe some prospects of Translation Studies development? What key trends and innovative approaches to translation can you name as the most promising ones?

I think the main problems to be solved ensue from globalization, new technologies, and de-professionalization.

In an age of migrations and shared second languages, translation cannot be studied in isolation from alternative strategies for cross-cultural communication (language learning, pidgins, code-switching, bilingual conversations). This means abandoning all pretence to perfect understanding; we should attempt to grasp the pragmatics of "good enough" strategies. This is basically why I see risk management (rather than equivalence, for example) as a promising paradigm for research, since it is non-idealist and can be applied to all forms of communication, not just translation.

At the same time, technologies integrating data-driven MT are making translation available to a wide array of non-professionals. I think this is a very positive social development, and we should take some time to understand it. This means abandoning the defense of exclusivist professionalism – as researchers, we should be prepared to risk opposing the professionals who claim that they are the only ones able to translate (because they pretend to own "equivalence" and the like).

2. What is the current state of affairs in sociocultural studies of translation and interpreting, an area much of your research is devoted to?

The recent calls for sociologies of translators are, I think, worrying in political and intellectual terms. This is mainly because we are mostly not thinking about sociology from the perspective of intercultural communication.

There are now many attempts to apply Bourdieu to translation (theories of field, capitals, and habitus), but none of them seems to appreciate the extent to which the intercultural is absent from Bourdieu – he was the sociologist of a nation, France, and he based his models on the social life of that nation (each group against the other, with no substantial theorization of possible mutual benefits).

Much the same could be said of attempts to apply Luhmann to translation (almost exclusively through the work of Theo Hermans). Luhmann's communicative systems are those of national societies; they do not see the intercultural as being anything more than "irritation" between systems.

Actor-network theory (Caillon, Latour, Law), on the other hand, is actually quite productive in translation research, basically because of the close attention to what happens at the micro level, and the lack of presuppositions about societies. However, there is no reason to apply this approach to translations simply because it calls itself a "sociologie de la traduction" – the term "translation" means different things in the two places.

I am much more interested in sociologies that attempt to see fragmented postmodern societies in terms of translational relationships, as is being done in Germany and Austria. But that involves doing a new kind of sociology, not Translation Studies as such.

3. Could you name some new trends in localization studies, another translation-based discipline you are involved with?

There are very few empirical research projects on localization as such. Instead, there is a plethora of gurus, with opinions and predictions.

The trends are thus more in the industry than in research. They include serious attention to crowd-sourcing, fan translation, and the incorporation of data-driven MT. I am aware of no serious research on these issues.

What is badly needed in localization studies are hard data on user-response. A lot of money is being spent on the localization of documentation, software and websites, often at low levels of linguistic quality, but no one really know what effect the various communication strategies are having on the receivers.

If the technologies allow some strange language to be produced, does it really matter? No one knows.

4. Studying Translation as Product is a well-established subject now. To your opinion, what are the prospects of studying Translation as Process, another "end" of the translation science?

Translation process studies are alive and well and living mostly in Scandinavia (if that includes Copenhagen). The methods include keystroke logging, screen-recording, eye-tracking, think-aloud protocols, and subject interviews.

We are slowly discovering a lot about how translators actually interact with texts. We are also getting lists of the ways in which professionals work differently from novices. Those lists should in turn become menus of "skills to be learned", and that should become the basis for all our translator-training programs. So I see a very direct connection between process research and training.

At the same time, I use process experiments in my practical translation classes. This basically mean getting studies to screen-record their processes, then play them back and analyze them. I find this a very exciting way of uniting research and training, particularly when we get students to work with new technologies.

Process research is also the only way to discover how risk is managed in translation, so it fits in with risk management as a general research paradigm.

A new area should be the application of process methodologies to the way texts are *used*, i.e. studies of translation *reception* processes.

For example, I would bet (but that is a risk) that the faster a translator translates, the stranger the language and the slower the user of the translation constructs usable information. So what you win on the swings, you lose on the roundabouts.

But no one really knows.