TRANSLATION

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1.   Introduction

Although human records of translation as a communicative activity between different nations and cultures can be traced as far back as 2000 BC (cf. Bell 1991: 3), when Sumerian cuneiform poems about Gilgamesh – a hero as well as a king of the state of Uruk in Sumer – were translated into some ancient Asian languages such as Akkadian and Hurrian, attempts to define this age-old social and cultural phenomenon have always encountered, as Toury (2012: 69) claimed, 'insurmountable difficulties' within the discipline of translation studies. The conspicuous absence of this entry in some popular dictionaries or encyclopedias on translation (e.g., Baker and Saldanha 2009; Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997, to cite a few) further testifies to the quandary translation scholars face in defining this elusive concept.

Toury's comment might sound rather counter-intuitive to some general readers who could probably come up with their own version for this concept easily, as translation is literally everywhere in the increasingly globalized world today. Their answers are likely to be: translation puts the meaning in one language into another language; or it is the activity of turning the spoken or written words of one language into another language. In a sense, there is nothing wrong with these layman's definitions, which to some extent reflect some fundamental features of translation. However, these descriptions are also incomplete, not only because they fail to meet the requirements of being 'both inclusive and exclusive' (Hermans 2013: 74) for a formal definition, but also because they present translation as if it were a fixed and static concept of homogenous nature, which is shared by different cultures and nations at all times.

This ahistorical view of translation as implied by this quick definitions does not, of course, reveal all the truths about this concept. In fact, the lack of historical and cultural perspectives when defining translation is particularly apparent in linguistically oriented approaches to translation which were especially popular 'from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s' (Fawcett 2003: foreword). A typical example can be seen in Catford's influential definition of translation, in which he describes translation as 'the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)' (Catford 1965: 20). This equivalence-based definition, as well as other classifications of

translation along similar lines, such as intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation (Jakobson 1959: 231–2), semantic and communicative translation (Newmark 1981: 39), was attacked by a group of researchers who believed that translation was not simply about meaning transfer or equivalence effect, but that it was an activity that was entangled in such cultural factors as 'context, history and convention' (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 11). Their embracing of translation as culture and politics, instead of word or text, led to the 'the cultural turn' (Snell-Hornby 1990) in translation studies in the 1990s (see also Section 3.1).

Admittedly, a full definition of translation without considering its dynamic interaction with culture is similar to envisaging the activity taking place in a societal vacuum, which is certainly far from the reality in which a translational work is produced. Nevertheless, a bigger problem in regarding translation as simply a linguistic transcoding process between two languages lies in the fact that this typical interpretation largely reflects Western thinking, or more exactly, Eurocentric conceptualizations about the term. The denotation and connotation of translation, as Tymoczko (2010: 54–106) convincingly argues, vary from culture to culture, as do notions of meaning and equivalence, and translation actually means different practices or things at different historical periods and places.

Thus, before we attempt at a full definition for translation, it is necessary for us to survey the inter-cultural and cross-historical understanding of the term across the world. With this knowledge, we might be able to better appreciate the dynamic nature and the openness of this concept.

In addition to reviewing this multifarious conceptualization of the term from a historical perspective, we will also examine contemporary categorization of the term and explore how the advancement in science and technology has enriched the content and expanded the boundary of this age-old concept.

2. Attempts to define translation around the world

As was pointed out in the first section, the understanding of translation as essentially a linguistic transfer between texts is not without its problems, as translation has been conceptualized differently across diverse cultures and used to refer to different entities historically. Furthermore, descriptions and prototypical features of translations are in fact rooted in the dominant literary tradition, cultural and religious practices of that particular context and time. The conceptualizations of translation in different cultures, such as Western, Chinese, Indian and Arabic, as well as in other parts of the world (see also Tymoczko 2010: 68–77), will be summarized in the next section to highlight the broad spectrum and the inherently dynamic and diverse nature of the activity of translation across different cultures.

2.1. Translation in (Western) Europe

According to the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (www.oed.com/), the etymology of the English word translation dates back to the classical Latin word of *translātiō*, which refers to the 'action of moving a thing from one place to another, change of position', or 'transfer of property or rights from one person to another'. Note here that the primary sense of 'relocating' or 'carrying across' still lingers in the main definitions of *translation* today,[1] which include the action of 'converting from one language to another', 'transferring or moving a person or thing' and 'transforming or altering' (ibid.). Homi Bhabha (1994:

225) aptly evoked the primary etymological sense of the term, that of 'moving from one place to another', and incorporated it in the concept of 'The Third Space' in his cultural translation theory. By highlighting the changing state which the act of translating entails, he emphasizes the fact that migrants are relocating to a new community utilizing translation, which inevitably leads them to be trapped in their 'culture of the "in-between"'.

Despite its symbolic meaning for cultural translation, the etymological trace and the modern sense of *translation* as a linguistic activity seem to reveal two features inherent in this concept: the first is the view of meaning (of source language) as something concrete, static and fixed, which could be moved to another language as if it were a separate object or entity; the second is the implication of the unavoidable change or transformation of the state, usually of an unfavourable type, involved by such a physical move. The fact that these two contradictory aspects can co-exist peacefully in the concept of translation partly highlights the indeterminate nature of the term which defies common attempts to define it.

The first insinuation, which comes from the early association of the term with the actual practice of moving 'religious relics in the later Middle Ages in Europe' (Tymoczko 2010: 57), actually reveals the relationship between the activity of translation and its crucial role in the transmission of religious or canonical documents (especially the Bible) which has long existed in the history of the Western world. Since the late Middle Ages, the Latin Vulgate, which was once the dominant version used in the Western cultural sphere, has witnessed the translations into national languages of the Vulgate, and Protestant translations into national languages carried out from the original Hebrew and Greek texts (see Nida and Taber 1969 for more about Bible translation). In biblical translation, the meaning of the Bible tends to be viewed as both fixed and sacred. What a translator needs to do is to convey the literal meaning of the text intact in another language (see Tymoczko 2010: 117), in a way that is most accessible to target readers. It is thus not surprising to see that in the West, debates on the nature of translation have often centred around the methods of transposing the meaning in a linguistic form that could be easily understood by the readers of the translation, stemming primarily from the evangelical purposes of Bible translation.

The second implication of *translation* in Western Europe, as an act entailing change or modification, usually of an undesirable nature, is best represented by the metaphors about this concept from history (see Shuttleworth 2017 for more about metaphor translation). A quick survey of this topic finds numerous metaphorical images depicting the various aspects of the concept, ranging from the nature of the translation activity to the translation product and the identity of translator. Readers might find themselves familiar with the following well-known metaphors originating from different nations of Western Europe, such as '*les belles infidèles*' (an unfaithful beauty), '*traduttore traditore*' (the translator is a traitor) or as remarked by John Dryden when he was commenting on the difficulty of translating Roman poet Ovid's epistles, 'translation is like dancing on ropes with fetter'd legs', all of which have negative or unpleasant innuendoes. The negative kind of reasoning that underlies these metaphors on *translation* in fact reflects the tradition of valorizing original meaning and the status of source text that has dominated the practice and study of translation for much of its long history in the West. This source-oriented approach to translation studies was not challenged until the 1970s and 1980s, when some scholars in the field of comparative literature reacted 'against the prescriptively oriented and linguistically inspired approaches to translation that were prevalent at the time' (Hermans 2019: 143).

To sum up, the sense of linguistic transposition at the heart of the English concept of *translation*, which could also be safely claimed to be the most widely adopted definition for

this term in other languages as well as in modern translation studies, is actually 'saturated with Western history, Western ideology, and Western religious meanings and practices' (Tymoczko 2010: 57). If we turn our eyes to other parts of the world and to non-Western cultures, we can immediately find definitions that do not align with the Occidental view of *translation*. But just as Western conceptualizations of the term are rooted in Western history and culture, all the different definitions in other cultures emphasize different aspects of the translation activity, which are deeply influenced by such factors as literary traditions, religious beliefs and habits of communication. The descriptions embedded in and the implications embodied by *translation* in these cultures are so diverse that they defy any attempt to craft a closed and circumscribed definition for this concept.

2.2.   *Translation in Asia*

In China, the term *fanyi* (翻譯, which is the corresponding concept for *translation* in Chinese) is also closely associated with the rendition of sacred texts, just like its Western counterpart. More exactly, *fanyi* is closely bound with the history of translating Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese, which began 'about AD 150, and continued at intervals until about 1050' (Barnes 2011: 8). The first character *fan*, which literally means 'turning over, rummaging or reversing' in modern Chinese, was first explained as 'the movement of flying' (翻翻，飛也) in *Guangya* (廣雅) – an ancient Chinese dictionary compiled by the scholar Zhang Yi (張揖) around AD 227–32. This flying image is typically exemplified by the flapping flight of birds which swing their wings up and down to reach different destinations. The sense of semi-circular motion implied by *fan* also resembles the page-flipping action in reading (Ruan 2019: 143). This etymological interpretation explains why since antiquity the practice and products of translation have been seen in Chinese culture as a written tradition rather than an oral one (Tymoczko 2010: 60). Another connotational baggage from *fan*, its metaphorical implication of the constantly flying motion of birds, is the emphasis on repetition, or repeating the original message in one's own words in translation. From the target readers' perspective, translations without the original linguistic traces will certainly ensure a smoother or more natural reading experience. This is precisely the aim of the translation strategy *yiyi* (意譯, which roughly means free translation) which was pioneered by Kumārajīva (c.344–413), a Buddhist monk, scholar and translator, in his translation of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit into Chinese. As one of the most famous translators in the history of China, Kumārajīva's translation approach exerted a great influence on the Chinese translators, no matter whether they were translating sacred or secular texts, to the extent that only free translations were considered as the standard (or proper) works for people to read. This free or liberal way of translating foreign texts into Chinese was still the dominant method used by Yan Fu (嚴復, 1854–1921), one of the most influential translators and scholars at the beginning of the 20th century, until it was challenged by a group of radical social and political leaders in the New Culture Movement in the 1910s and 1920s that aimed to introduce democratic and scientific ideas to form a new culture in China.

The interpretation and implication of *fan* being an indirect meaning transfer from one language into another might be said to be closely linked to the traditional sutra relay translation strategy, which has been the dominant translation strategy used by most sutra translators in the history of China. In contrast, the meaning of the second character *yi* is more related to the trade mode practiced in ancient China. A recent study (Ruan 2019) on text exegesis and the evolution of the meaning of *yi*, which means 'to translate, interpret,

decode' in modern Chinese, argued that the term was the name for courier stations which were established along roads at regular intervals in early times (ibid.: 140). At these stations, official postmen, who rode long distances to deliver important documents (usually of military nature), were provided with food and accommodation so that they could have a good rest before the next leg of the journey. Here they could also find fresh horses in order to maximize speed and efficiency. In cases of emergency, even the couriers were replaced, with the idea that new blood would carry on the journey with a new energy and drive, which might possibly shorten the delivery time. Note that *yi* still means 'station' in Japanese and Korean today, two languages which have been heavily influenced by traditional Chinese.

It is interesting to see that the concepts of 'relaying' and 'joint-effort' as embodied by *yi*, with the image of couriers at different stations working together to deliver the message as quickly as possible, were exactly represented in Kumārajīva's prolific translation practices, in which he first produced draft translations before asking his aides to proofread and polish the texts. Kumārajīva was credited as a pioneer of this partnership mode of translation, which has become a typical characteristic of the translation tradition and practices in China. Thus, one will not be surprised to learn that Lin Shu (1852–1924), a renowned Chinese "translator" who has introduced more than 170 English or French novels to classical Chinese, actually does not have any knowledge of these two languages. He accomplished this impressive task – similar to Kumārajīva – by collaborating with others, but this time the other way around: his aides produced the first version for his later refinement into elegant Chinese prose.

Coincidentally, the etymological meaning of *anuvad*, one of the major terms used for translation in India today, also indicates 'saying after or again, repeating' (Trivedi 2006: 111), echoing the sense of repetition implied by the Chinese character *fan*. But differences do exist between these two terms. Whereas the Chinese term emphasizes the rewording process of the original message, the Indian term seems to stress rather the oral tradition as it also suggests 'imitating (in speaking)' (ibid.). In addition, the implied meaning of rephrasing the original context in a natural and smooth target language indicated by *yi* is also absent in the old meaning of *anuvada* – the Sanskrit cognate closest to *anuvad* – which insinuates 'repetition without change or gloss' (Trivedi 2006: 112). Apparently, such an insistence on the accuracy of repetition of *anuvada* is rooted in the oral tradition of preserving religious literature in early India, in which even the slightest variance would be considered sacrilege (ibid.). Mukherjee (1994: 43) argues that the spoken convention might also be at the root of a process named *transcreation* in Indo-English, for which the quality of translations is assessed by oral standards, based on a preference for using spoken forms of language. It can be safely argued here that the sense of 'repeating' and 'saying after' conveyed by both *fan* in Chinese and *anuvad* in Hindi all indicate a temporal dimension, as opposed to the spatial dimension implied by the sense of 'relocating' or 'carrying across' of *translation* in the West.

In addition to *anuvad*, another term *rupantara* is also frequently reserved for literary translation in Hindi (Trivedi 2006: 113), a naming practice which is not often seen in other cultures. Interestingly, while *anuvad* implies an exact oral repetition of the source text, *rupantara* suggests a linguistic act that involves 'a change in form' (Trivedi 2006: 113), or 'transformation. . . adaptation (of a tale, a work)' (McGregor 1993: 868). Given the fact that India is a country with very diverse cultural, linguistic and religious traditions, it might be not surprising to see the two totally different traditions of oral (represented by *anuvad*) and written translations (implied by *rupantara*), i.e., faithful vs. free could co-exist at the

same time in this vast sub-continent. However, the diversified nature of the concepts of *translation* as indicated by these two terms even in the same region amply demonstrates the challenge of formulating a specific or circumscribed type of translation definition.

Instead of focusing on communication acts, either oral or written ones between different languages, as conveyed by the concepts of *translation*, *fanyi*, *anuvad* and *rupantara*, their counterpart in the Arabic word *tarjama* seems to foreground the patron underlying the activity more, as one of its senses is 'biography' (Salama-Carr 2000: 128). This etymological implication, which is perhaps related to early Syriac Christian translators' focus on the lives of saints of the Bible (see Tymoczko 2010: 70), also indicates the role of the translator both as a realizer of a patron's commission as well as a powerful reteller who can reframe original stories according to their own perspectives. When it comes to the activity of translation, it is the translator, rather than the patron, who makes the final decision in terms of word choices. Other than directly influencing the way a translation was carried out, the power of patrons such as governments or caliphates was also essential in creating a glorious period of translation activity in the medieval Arab World (Faiq 2000: 83). Ever since the Islamic polity was established in the region late in the seventh century, translation was given a special status by different Arabic rulers who regarded it as an effective way to disseminate their Islamic faith, to promote their culture as well as to strengthen their newly established states (Faiq 2000: 84). The reign of these caliphates (especially the Abbasid Caliphate) witnessed the initiation and patronization of the translation of many important Greek scientific works into Arabic, culminating in the golden age of Arabic translation during the ninth and tenth centuries (Faiq 2000: 84). Under the aegis of these powerful patrons, official translation institutions and government agencies for translation, arguably the first in the world, were established, a further testimony to the inextricable link between a patron and the meaning of *tarjama*.

2.3. *A brief survey of translation in other cultures of the world*

Similar to the different denotations and associations with the concept in the major cultures outlined here, the term *translation* in some other nations also reveals its rich and diverse meanings, most of which are different from the 'default' sense of linguistic transfer across languages within the Western translation studies paradigm. Due to space constraints, it is not possible to give a detailed account here of all the meanings embodied by the concept in these regions, but a quick summary will suffice to show the diverse and heterogeneous nature of the concept.

In Africa, where the oral tradition of interlingual activity seems to be the norm, translation involves cultural transfer, often by telling the stories from the colonized to the colonizer. For example, when rendering traditional speech such as proverbs and aphorisms into an alien language, indigenous translators often have to resort to a literal translation strategy 'with a significant input from the oral narrative' (Bandia 2000: 157) to mend the rupture in their spoken tradition which has been brought about by colonialism and Christianity. The valorization of the spoken form of translation is clearly indicative in the etymology of the term for translation in different African languages. For instance, *tapia* – one of the words for translation in Igbo, a Nigerian language – stresses the storytelling nature of the activity. Specifically, the etymological roots for *tapia* include *ta* and *pia*: whereas the first root means telling or narrating, the second indicates the act of breaking something up. When combined together and used in the context of translation, *tapia* conveys the overall sense of the telling

or narrating into a different form of a text which has been segmented or divided into meaningful units (cf. Tymoczko 2010: 71). Clearly, the term resonates the sense of *anuvada*, the Sanskrit word for translation, which also gives much weight to the oral mode of the act.

Turning our eyes to other regions of Asia, we find that the conceptual territory for *translation* is also very diverse and bound by cultural traditions. The words for *translation* in Tagalog and Malay – two varieties of the Austronesian languages – are *pagsalin* and *tersalin*, both of which come from the same root of *salin*, referring to the act of 'pour(ing) the contents of one container into another, such as pouring a small can of juice into a glass' (Barbaza 2005: 250).[2] This metaphor suggests flexibility during the process, in which the content, such as oil or water, might be adjusted or changed to fill containers of different shapes. Fidelity is thus not the aim of this act of translation. Instead, the role of the translator, who decides how the text should be 'rewritten according to [their] own needs and interests' (ibid.), is highlighted in this transferring process. Similarly, the powerful image of the translator is also emphasized in *tersalin* (or *disalin*) – the closest Malay word for 'to translate' – which also means 'giv(ing) birth' in its active form (Jedamski 2005: 213). Reading this semantic association, one cannot help but sense the creativity and productivity of the translator, whose effort leads to a rebirth or revitalization of the original.

Interestingly, in Japan, where numerous Chinese classics had already been imported and used as the foundation for Japanese education 'right up to the mid-twentieth century' (Semizu 2005: 283), there was actually no such a concept as translation for this practice, even though Japanese and Chinese are two different languages. Part of the reason is that *kanji* – the Chinese written system in which these classics were written – can be read in Japanese through *kanbun-kundoku*, a unique way of reading Chinese texts in Japanese which was developed in the mid-sixth century.

The interpretation process involves the assigning of Japanese pronunciation to *kanji* characters, which are symbols directly borrowed from Chinese language, with *kunten* symbols that are used to 'indicate the order in which the Chinese words should be read in accordance with Japanese syntax' (Wakabayashi 1999: 2, quoted in Semizu 2005: 290). It was by means of *kanbun-kundoku* that most ancient Chinese classics found their way into Japan. In other words, in ancient Japan, we have a translational situation in which all Chinese originals were retained verbatim, with only the annotation of Japanese pronunciation for each Chinese character. The particular way that translations were produced, perceived and read offers a new frame of reference within which the cross-cultural concept of *translation* can be more richly explained and calls into question the legitimacy of pursuing a single and unified definition of the concept today.

3. Framing *translation* within the discipline of translation studies

A detailed discussion on how *translation* has been interpreted or approached in different cultures around the world would be certainly beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the brief review of the framing of this concept within some non-European cultures in Section 2 is enough to point to the fact that *translation* is not solely about the endless seeking for 'equivalence' between the source and the target languages, which is actually a Eurocentric conceptualization 'both in its theoretical explorations and its historical grounding' (Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 1). It is also a fact that various attempts have been made by scholars in the field of translation studies to propose definitions for this elusive concept within the particular theoretical frameworks of different languages and cultures. Although

these definitions might not cover the multifaceted nature of the cross-cultural concept of *translation* and are unable to account for the radically different translation practices around the world (such as those mentioned earlier), they nevertheless help us gain more knowledge about the term from various conceptual perspectives.

3.1. *Conceptualizing translation from within different theoretical frameworks in contemporary translation studies*

Conceptualizations of *translation* within the contemporary or more exactly, the Western paradigm of translation studies, a discipline which witnessed its inception in the 1950s with the early efforts of scholars like Nida (1964) and Catford (1965) of incorporating linguistic theories into translation research, were primarily concerned with the attainment of different types of equivalence for translations between different language pairs.

Catford's definition of translation mentioned in Section 1 is primarily based on 'the Firthian and Hallidayan linguistic model' (Munday 2016: 95). In contrast, Nida and Taber, whose theories of translation are influenced by Chomsky's generative grammar, define translations as a process that 'consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style' (Nida and Taber 1969: 12). Their definition is one of the early attempts to highlight the role of recipient's response for this interlingual activity. On the surface, this conceptualization seems to be in line with Nida's well-known statement that 'translation means translating meaning' (Nida 1993: 5). Nevertheless, the use of the closest and the most natural expressions in the target language usually entails a sacrifice of some of the original meaning. To Nida, this is totally acceptable, at least in his field of Bible translation, in which fluent and idiomatic language better serves the purpose of propagating Christian evangelism and eventually helps to convert the receivers.

Note also that these early attempts, as well as some of those still to be discussed, often did not make a deliberate distinction between such aspects as translation process, criteria or strategies in their definitions, which often lead to queries as to whether it is the product, process, context or participants of the activity that was being discussed under the seemingly umbrella term of translation.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a group of German theorists challenged the dominance of equivalence in early definitions of translation and argued that the process and the final product of translation are above all geared towards fulfilling the function or 'skopos' that the target text is meant to serve in the target culture. Instead of formulating a definition of *translation* from the point of view of the source text, like most earlier conceptualizations, these functionalists adopted a pragmatic perspective for the activity and regarded it as 'the production of a functional target text maintaining a relationship with a given source text that is specified according to the intended or demanded function of the target text (translation skopos)' (Nord 1991: 28) Another convenient phrase to summarize the rationale for this process, as described by Nord (1997: 29), is 'the end justifies the means'. Undoubtedly, the skopos-based definition of translation highlights the role of translation commissioner, translator and target audience in making the translation process successful, an important component for the activity which is usually lacking in equivalence-based or linguistically oriented approaches to the concept. Nevertheless, it fails to specify who actually constitutes the target readership, which could be of very

diverse composition, as well as how to negotiate the difference, which is frequently expected in real translation practice, between the client or commissioner of the translation task and the translator, as he or she is influenced by his or her own agenda or ideology during the act. The lack of adequate explanations for the composition of the target readership and the possible conflict of intentions among the parties involved in the skopos theory might explain why there has not been much progress in functionalist approaches to translation since the 1990s.

Similarly, Toury also adopts a target language point of view in his descriptive translation studies (DTS) – a branch of translation studies which was initially proposed by James S. Holmes in the early 1970s. Instead of focusing on the possible ways in which translators ensure that their end products function satisfactorily in particular linguistic or cultural contexts, Toury is more interested in finding out what translations are actually like across different cultures at different periods of time. His definition of translations as first and foremost 'facts of the culture that would host them' (Toury 2012: 18) comes as the natural corollary of his early definition that regards a translation as 'any target language text which is presented or regarded as such within the target system itself, on whatever grounds' (Toury 1982: 27). Although Toury (2012: 19) once claimed that both skopos and DTS approaches shared the same target text-oriented paradigm, there are clear differences between them: whereas the former is still dominantly prescriptive in the sense that it stipulates what translations should be like and how they should be evaluated, the latter is purely descriptive as it attempts to reconstruct the linguistic patterns (including various translation shifts) inherent in translation products as well as to reveal norms or laws governing the translation process. It is important to note that Toury's concept of the end products of translation, which might sound too capacious to narrow down, indeed signals an important departure from the earlier *a priori* definitional impulse as it attempts for the first time to delineate *a posteriori* the objects of study in translation. By not delimiting the boundaries intentionally, Toury in fact gives a much-needed openness and flexibility to the complicated concept of *translation*, an activity which is located at the interface of society, language, culture and history.

The linguistically oriented conceptualization of *translation* as a pure linguistic transfer which takes place in a sort of vacuum was also seriously questioned by some comparative literature scholars at the beginning of the 1980s, when they took issue with the so-called scientific stance that usually characterizes linguistic approaches to translation. They argued that translations, especially those of literary works, never reflected their originals in a faithful manner. Instead, as suggested by Lefevere (1982), they only *refracted* their originals, the degree and the extent of their refraction being closely related to such factors as the ideologies, poetics and politics of the target culture at the time the translations were produced. Translation becomes a form of 'refraction', which is defined as 'the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work' (Lefevere 1982: 4). Other literary activities that might achieve a similar purpose include anthologization, historiography, criticism or editing. Lefevere's indirect definition of translation, which emphasizes the flexible and malleable nature of its production process, echoes Toury's concept of *translation* as both underscore its open, complex and often indeterminate boundaries. Both Toury's and Lefevere's descriptive stance point to a feasible way of conceptualizing a general concept of *translation*, an attempt picked up by Sandra Halverson and Maria Tymoczko, whose works will be discussed in the next section.

It is now safe to say that the more we review the different approaches to the definitions of translation, the more we see how blurred the boundaries and fuzzy the nature of this concept are. It will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to give an inclusive definition of the concept which can comprise all forms of translation throughout human history, irrespective of all cultures, nations, religions, politics, purposes and specific language pairs concerned. Instead of approaching this concept from the perspective of the source text, a frequently adopted method which is bound to lead to closed, partial and fragmented representations of the transcultural concept of *translation*, we would find the task more accomplishable if we were to formulate sufficient conditions for the concept from the other way round, i.e., from the pole of target culture, just as Lefevere and Toury have done in their conceptualizations. Indeed, the more various linguistic, literary, discursive and cultural forms or practices we find about translation in different languages, regions and histories, the more we can pin down the broad scope and diverse nature of this encompassing concept. From a post-positivist point of view, seeing translation from multiple perspectives, especially beyond Western academic traditions, and investigating the multifarious facts of translation around the world also help us to move away from the dominant Western theorization of the concept and circumvent the ethnocentric privileging of Western culture.

One such perspective is the proposal by Mary Snell-Hornby (1988) and Sandra Halverson (1997, 1999a, 1999b) of using prototype theory to explore the structures and categories of *translation*. They argue that the definition of translation can be best exemplified by using representative or typical examples that share characteristics found in all translation activities. These scholars are actually more concerned with developing a research method in translation studies by looking for the most typical common ground for this concept on a cognitive theoretical basis, rather than exhausting the descriptions of the diverse forms of the transcultural concept of *translation*. Nevertheless, their attempt can help to avoid the culturally chauvinistic implications which are usually associated with the formulation of the concept in Western academic discourse. In addition, by summarizing the key features of the more representative exemplars of translation found in different cultures, such as the image of flying, the notion of verbal repetition and the authority of the patron underlying the concept in Chinese, Indian and Arabic cultures, respectively, we may be able to sum up the most important traits for the entire category named *translation*, across time, nations and languages.

However, the idea of seeking common components and enlisting the most important shared features in defining a concept as proposed by prototype theorists (Murphy 2002: 235) was contested by Tymoczko (2010: 93), who argued that due to the inherently complex social character of *translation*, this approach only simplifies the dynamic, diachronic nature and it underrepresents the kaleidoscopic diversity of this 'transnational, transcultural, and translinguistic' concept. Furthermore, given the fact that the so-called core features are typically identified by a group of experts in prototype theory, according to Tymoczko, it will inevitably lead to subjectivity on the part of these researchers, who can only conduct this empirical research within a certain culture at a given time. To avoid the one-sided and ahistorical perspective of prototype theory, she proposed the use of a 'cluster concept' to construct a general concept of *translation*, similar to the way Wittgenstein (1953: 66) used this paradigm to articulate the notion of 'game'.

In his illustration of 'cluster concept', Wittgenstein (1953) claims that since not one of the criteria forms a necessary or sufficient condition for 'game', we have to accept the fact

that this concept is defined by all the criteria that constitute the memberships for the category 'game'. In the words of Wittgenstein (1953: 66):

> Consider for example the proceedings that we call 'games'. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games'" – but look and see whether there is anything in common to all. For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.

In looking for the common features of the concept game, Wittgenstein found that many shared features drop out, whereas other new traits appear between every different pair of games. He (1953: 67) thus termed this complex network of relationships 'family resemblances'. Tymoczko (2010: 97) believes that this philosophical idea as well as the notion of 'cluster concept' can shed fresh light on the elusive concept of *translation* as they entail the inclusion of the various types of translation processes and products specific to different cultural contexts and times. Indeed, conceptualizing *translation* from this perspective will make it less of a purely Western concept by introducing 'a decentered and truly international approach to translation studies as a field that is open to all players in the world' (Tymoczko 2010: 98).

Now it seems that the theoretical framework of 'cluster concept', especially because of its encompassing nature, provides one of the most workable solutions to define *translation*, if this definition is intended to comprise translations of all cultures and all historical periods. However, the all-inclusiveness that this concept aims at in defining *translation* also demonstrates some weaknesses. The basic tenets of the philosophical ideas of 'cluster concept' and 'family resemblances' are their emphasis on the recognition and contribution of individual features to the definition of concept, while acknowledging the fact that these traits might not be shared by all the members of this conceptual category. Put differently, there are no common essential features for a concept, as each individual feature within this category only expands and blurs its conceptual boundary. Undoubtedly, this off-centered, dynamic and descriptive approach to translation does reflect its true social nature as well as its cultural and historical complexity, which could lead to *a broad definition* of translation that is productive in the study of translation as an academic discipline. However, the lack of the core and definitive traits and the inclusion of ever-emerging features in this broad definition make the formulation of the concept look like a hopeless task. It is already very difficult, if not utterly impossible, to exhaust the descriptions of the various features of translation processes and products in the past and present. Nevertheless, what complicates the broad conceptualization is the new features that will be brought about by future changes. As we know, new technology and globalization keep endowing translation – this age-old profession – with new characteristics that have never been seen before (Dam, Brøgger, and Zethsen 2019). While the addition of these new features makes the broad definition of translation robust and up to date, it renders futile any effort to draw up the boundary for this concept. Yet the lack of a definition for translation, no matter how tentative or provisional, poses practical problems in reality, especially in the scenario of translator training. Thus, in addition to the attempt to seek a general and broad definition of translation, which is destined to be an endless journey, there is also a need to establish *a narrow definition* of this concept that can be used in specific subject fields and cultural contexts during a

particular period of time. Contrary to Tymoczko's arguments, prototype theory, with its focus on the overlapping similarities and exemplars in formulating a concept, can be applied to achieve this aim. By capturing the most representative, or prototypical, features of translation during a particular period, we are able to develop a provisional definition for translations of a particular type. Of course, a narrow definition of translation cannot fully account for historical, cultural backgrounds and presuppositions in the way that a broad definition of translation can. Nevertheless, it can serve as a practical and feasible guideline at least for working translators who must translate, translation trainers and trainees who need to learn the trade of translating now.

4. Conclusion

As an academic discipline in its own right, translation studies has always struggled to find a definitive definition for *translation*, both as an indispensable theoretical basis for any translation theory and as a clear guideline for all translation practice. This definitional impulse has led to various conceptualizations of translation, most of which are based on the equivalent relationship between source text and target text. As mentioned in Section 2.1, this linguistically based definition, widely accepted as the default general definition for *translation* now, is drawn heavily from Western philological, literary and religious traditions. A quick historical survey of the term in other major cultures of the world shows ample counterexamples to this Eurocentric idea which attempts to define *translation* as a circumscribed meaning-based concept. Furthermore, various attempts have been made to reframe *translation* within different theoretical frameworks, but again with marginal success. This is because *translation*, in essence, is a cluster concept which embraces open and fuzzy boundaries: all the past, present and future practices and thinking on *translation* in different cultures both add to the meaning and expand the dimension of this dynamic concept. It can be envisaged that this broad definition of *translation*, with its readiness to admit idiosyncratic translational performance and thinking across time, space and cultures will foster the development of a truly international discipline of translation studies. However, given the open, flexible and indeterminate nature of the broad definition, it cannot be readily formulated and used as a criterion for practical considerations of translation, such as in translator training programs or commercial translation. Hence, there is a need for narrow definitions of the concept, based on prototype theory, for translations of diverse text types, as such provisional and usually prescriptive conceptualizations of *translation* can enable the practicalities of translation to be approached in a concrete and specific manner.

Further reading

Dam, Helle V., Matilde Nisbeth Brøgger, and Karen Korning Zethsen (eds) (2019) *Moving Boundaries in Translation Studies*. London, Routledge.
　　This edited book introduces the new trends in translation studies which lead to the increasingly widening borders in the discipline. New practices such as technical writing, localization, transcreation and post-editing are now being added to the research portfolios of the discipline.
Tymoczko, Maria (2014) *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*. London, Routledge.
　　This book advocates a de-Westernized and open conceptualization of translation so as to enlarge the concept of translation and empower translators. It points out the problems of positivism and parochialism in translation studies, illustrated with a brief history of the discipline and multiple examples of translation traditions in other cultures.

Halverson, Sandra L. (1999) 'Conceptual Work and the "Translation" Concept', *Target*: *International Journal of Translation Studies* 11, No. 1: 1–31.
In this article, the author proposes that the concept of translation is of a prototype category. Using the concept of "car" as an analogy, the author argues that the conceptualization of translation is not the delineation of the categorical boundaries but the description of its internal structuring and its relationship with others.

Related topics

earliest discourses on translation, linguistic theories of translation, functional theories of translation, cultural turn in translation studies, the history of translation and interpreting

Notes

1 The italicized form of translation is specifically used here to refer to the term itself, not the result of a translation process (e.g., a text) or the act of producing a translation.
2 Pym argues that the Latin verb 'vertere', which is mostly used for translating texts, has also the metaphoric association of 'pouring', and this image 'is not difficult to find within European thought' (Pym 2011: 54). However, a more usual interpretation for this Latin word is 'to turn'. It would be fair to say that, historically, the 'pouring' metaphor about translation is not as popular as the one on meaning transfer and is only slightly related to the interpretation of the concept.

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