Translation and interpreting

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Introduction

Translation and interpreting are forms of linguistic mediation that involve rendering written or oral text from one language to another. As language-based activities that have practical implications, they are often seen as falling within the remit of applied linguistics. Following a brief introduction and historical survey of the field, this chapter focuses on some of the main issues that have interested both translation scholars and applied linguists in recent years. It does not engage with the use of translation in language teaching (for an authoritative overview of this issue, see Cook 2009).

Increased globalization, growing mobility of people and commodities, and the spread and intensity of armed conflicts in recent years have established translation and interpreting more firmly in the public consciousness. As both facilitators and beneficiaries of increased global interconnectedness, translators and interpreters have become important economic players in the services sector worldwide, with surveys forecasting an average annual business growth of 5–7.5 per cent between 2005 and 2010 (CSA 2004; EUATC 2005) and the global translation industry turnover expected to exceed €12 billion in 2010 (ABI 2002). Recent comparable reports on the interpreting industry estimate the global outsourced interpreting market at $2.5 billion, $700 million of which is generated by the burgeoning field of telephone interpreting (CSA 2008). At the same time, translators and interpreters have become more widely recognized as important political players, with their involvement in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan in particular receiving widespread media attention.

Economic clout and political impact aside, the growing pervasiveness of translation and interpreting in all domains of private and public life has also heightened the need for a better understanding of their social relevance. Against the backdrop of the growing dominance of English as a lingua franca, translation and interpreting have become central to promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in the information society and in the development of multilingual content in global media networks and the audiovisual marketplace. They have also become central to the delivery of institutional agendas in a wide range of settings, from supranational organizations to judicial and healthcare services at community level. The importance of translation and interpreting as tools of empowerment is further evident in the
The study of translation has a very long history, going back several centuries to scholars like Cicero, Horace and Jerome, all of whom commented extensively on strategies of translation (e.g. word-for-word versus sense-for-sense). But the academic study of translation and interpreting dates back only to the middle of the twentieth century. Initially focusing on short, often decontextualized stretches of text, much theorizing during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s revolved around elaborating taxonomies of different types of equivalence that may hold between a source text and its translation. Largely understood as a semantic category in the 1950s, equivalence was first defined as

a process by which a spoken or written utterance takes place in one language which is intended and presumed to convey the same meaning as a previously existing utterance in another language. It thus involves two distinct factors, a ‘meaning’, or reference to some slice of reality, and the difference between two languages in referring to that reality.

(Rabin 1958: 123, emphasis added)

The notion of equivalence here is similar to that of synonymy, except that one applies to items in two different languages and the other to items in the same language. As a semantic category, the notion of equivalence is static – it is not dictated by the requirements of the communicative situation but purely by the semantic content of the source text.

Partly in response to developments within linguistics, which for a long time was the main source of theorization about translation, the treatment of equivalence as a semantic category soon came to be regarded as untenable. One of the first alternatives to be offered was a definition of equivalence not as a question of ‘how close’ a target text is to the same reality portrayed in the source text but rather as how close it comes to reproducing the same effect or response in the target readers. This approach originated with Bible translators: Nida (1964); Nida and Taber (1969); and Larson (1984). The idea of equivalent effect proved equally problematic, however, since no reliable way could be found for measuring effect in readers. Not only is it impossible to know how two people are likely to respond to a given text, but even the same reader will respond differently to the same text on different occasions. Some scholars later attempted to salvage something of the potential usefulness of the idea of ‘equivalent effect’ by limiting it to ‘similarity’ in a very immediate sense. For instance, Hervey and Higgins (1992: 23) suggest that the translator of a portion of a source text which makes the source reader laugh can attempt to produce a translation which makes its own reader laugh. As they themselves go on to explain, this is ‘a gross reduction of the effects of a text to a single effect’.

An alternative which gained much ground in the 1970s and 1980s was equivalence of function. Scholars such as Reiss (1971) and House (1981) tried to categorize the range of possible textual functions or communicative purposes and suggest ways in which equivalence may be achieved in relation to the most prominent function in the source text. House’s model of quality assessment, for example, draws on Halliday’s notions of ideational and interpersonal functions and involves three steps: drawing a textual profile which characterizes the function of the source text, drawing a similar profile for the translated text, and comparing the two to
identify any shifts in function. The result is a statement of the relative match of the two functional components (the ideational and interpersonal).

Apart from the obvious problems of defining a single function for a text, this approach is divorced from the realities of translation in that it assumes that the function of the target text has to be equivalent to that of the source text. But in the professional world it is common for clients to request rough translations which allow for a basic understanding of the content of source texts (e.g. contracts or judgments) but are not meant to serve an equivalent (regulatory or argumentative) function in the target context. In response to this challenge, new approaches emerged in the 1980s, particularly in Germany, which pointed out that the reasons for commissioning or initiating a translation are independent of the reasons for creating the source text. What matters, therefore, is the function of the translated text, not that of the source text. Equivalence here becomes a function of the commission accompanying a request for translation (Vermeer 1989b/2000). Scholars like Vermeer therefore talk of ‘adequacy’ with regard to the commission or purpose of translation, rather than equivalence, as the standard for judging target texts. Nord (1991) takes this further by suggesting that it is not the text itself that has a function – rather a text acquires its function in the situation in which it is received.

As can be seen from the development of thinking about equivalence, by the late 1980s studies of translation had begun to widen their scope of analysis considerably: they gradually moved outwards from the word to the sentence, to structures above the sentence, to the text as a unit of analysis, and finally to the text as a cultural artefact that functions in a specific context of situation. By then, too, the text had come to be seen as an instance of interaction that embodies the values a given culture attaches to certain practices and concepts. Cultural studies and literary theory in particular came to exercise considerable influence on the study of translation from this non-linguistic perspective (Venuti 1995; Hermans 1996; Tymoczko 1999). As far as linguistics is concerned, scholars of translation also began to draw on an expanding array of theoretical strands and fields – including but not limited to critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, psycholinguistics and semiotics (Saldanha 2009). The work of Hatim and Mason (1990, 1997) proved extremely influential in widening the remit of linguistically informed studies of translation and interpreting, in particular by engaging with issues of ideology and positioning.

Corpus linguistics has provided a robust methodology for studying translation since the mid-1990s (Laviosa 2002). The application of corpus-based methodologies in translation studies uniquely involves comparing a computer-held corpus consisting exclusively of translated text and one consisting exclusively of non-translated texts (or utterances) produced in the same language. Such comparison aims to demonstrate the distinctive nature of translation as a genre in its own right by identifying recurrent patterns in the language produced by translators (Baker 1996; Laviosa 1998; Olohan 2003) and interpreters (Pérez-González 2006a). Baker (1993) first proposed that translation is subject to a set of constraints which inevitably leave traces in the language that translators produce: the fact that a translated text is constrained by a fully articulated text in another language, for instance, constitutes a major and unique constraint. This builds on the work of Frawley (1984), who suggested that the confrontation of source text and target language during the process of translation results in creating what he called a ‘third code’. In other words, the language that evolves during translation and in which the target text is expressed is a kind of compromise between the norms of the source language and those of the target language. But corpus-based studies of translation go further, by suggesting that, for example, translators have a tendency to make explicit what is either implicit in the source text or would be implicit in a non-translated text in the same language. Along these lines, corpus-based studies undertaken by Burnett (1999) and Olohan and Baker (2000) have
since revealed a much higher tendency to spell out the optional *that* in reporting structures in translated English text compared to non-translated English text belonging to the same genres. Similarly, Olohan (2003) found a noticeable tendency to avoid contractions (as in *won’t* instead of *will not*) in translated vs non-translated English text.

Since the 1990s, many studies have focused on the role played by ideology and power in shaping translational behaviour. The extent to which translational behaviour lends support to or undermines the use of language as an instrument of ideological control is becoming a recurrent object of enquiry in studies informed by critical discourse analysis; Saldanha (2009) offers a detailed overview of such advances. Other research strands drawing on the social sciences attempt to account for the impact of mediators’ view of the world on their translational behaviour by exploring the narratives to which they and their communities subscribe (Baker 2006). Such studies interrogate the way in which the professional conduct of translators and interpreters is negotiated against the backdrop of existing norms of translation as a social institution, and have challenged the widely held perception of translation and interpreting as routinized, uncritical activities.

**Current research issues in translation and interpreting**

*Translation and interpreting as institutionalized and institution-building practices*

Koskinen (2008: 17) argues that institutions, which she defines as forms of ‘uniform action governed by role expectations, norms, values and belief systems’, can be studied on different levels of abstraction. This section focuses on two types of institutional settings: local/national organizational systems and supranational bureaucratic cultures.

With increased globalization, migration and other forms of mobility, encounters between representatives of institutions and lay citizens requesting a range of services have come to be heavily mediated by interpreters and translators. Bilingual courtroom proceedings in English-speaking countries, for instance, are characterized by sophisticated use of questioning strategies by barristers; the effectiveness of such strategies is heavily dependent on the interpreters’ mediation, as demonstrated in a number of studies (Berk-Seligson 1999; Hale 2001; Pérez-González 2006a). Recognizing the potential impact of interpreters on the judicial process, the legal profession has attempted to regulate the interpreters’ role by means of codes of practice that require them to refrain from explicating or clarifying those elements which are deliberately left ambiguous, implicit or unclear in the counsel’s original formulation. Similarly, interpreters involved in doctor-patient interaction and interviews of asylum seekers and political refugees are expected to align themselves with the interactional goals of their respective institutions, rather than with the individuals requiring institutional assistance. Interpreters have been shown to reinforce institutional discourses and agendas by enforcing certain interactional patterns, such as rigid question-answer exchanges that prevent political refugees from launching into a narrative of their personal tragedies while their asylum claims are being assessed (Jacquemet 2005), and by exercising their discretion in organizationally sanctioned ways. Medical interpreters, for example, tend to elicit from the patient and pursue issues that they regard as diagnostically relevant and excise those parts of the patient’s response that contain subjective accounts of their concerns (Bolden 2000).

Despite ongoing efforts to limit the interpreter’s latitude, work on institutional interpreting, including research informed by various strands of linguistic theories, has shown that even interpreters bound by the strictest codes of ethics often fail to provide the sort of straightforward, unedited renditions which their organizational co-interactants expect (Berk-Seligson
For one thing, lack of syntactic and semantic equivalence between languages, together with the stress under which interpreters operate, often lead them to inadvertently alter the tenor of the original utterance, for example by downgrading the suggestive and intimidating nature of key questions and statements. At the same time, even conference interpreters working in a highly formal context have been shown to depart from their canonical roles as conduits and speak in their own voice in order to defend themselves against charges of misinterpreting by other interactants wishing to use them as scapegoats (Diriker 2004). In the light of such findings, the overall field of interpreting studies, it has been argued, should refrain from ‘comparing the propositional meaning of utterances and their interpretation’ and seek instead to challenge the conceptualization of the role of interpreters as neutral conduits by describing ‘the behaviour of all parties in terms of the set of factors governing the exchange’ (Mason and Stewart 2001: 54). Such arguments have paved the way for the emergence and consolidation of dialogue interpreting, a distinct sub-field within interpreting studies which has enhanced the study of mediation in institutional settings. Dialogue interpreting approaches face-to-face encounters as three-way interactions, understood as a series of triadic exchanges between the institutional representative, the client and the interpreter (Mason 2001).

The power imbalance inherent in interpreter-mediated institutional encounters makes politeness theory an attractive framework to draw on. Interpreters occasionally need to mitigate the face-threatening acts of an interactant – for example, when a powerless speaker resists or fails to comply with the requirements of the institutional representative. They also need to protect their own face, perhaps by distancing themselves from the contributions of one or more speakers. Such dialectics of interactional status and face-saving work has also been explored through investigations of turn-taking management and the use of hedging, down-toning or amplifying interactional devices. Here, Goffman’s (1981) ‘participation framework’ has proved helpful (Wadensjö 1998; Roy 2000) and has also been applied in studies of sign language interpreting (Metzger 1999). Documented shifts in footing reveal the interpreters’ alignments in relation to other interactants and highlight their role as institutional ‘gatekeepers’ (Wadensjö 1998). In managing the exchanges between lay people and institutional representatives, interpreters perform a range of repairing and bridging work required for a successful unfolding of the ongoing encounter. In the course of doing so, they often interpret selectively; indeed, medical interpreters have been found to offer their own answers to patients’ questions without the physician necessarily being aware of it, thus acting as covert co-diagnosticians (Davidson 2000). Interpreters thus claim a participatory role for themselves ‘as speaking agents who are critically engaged in the process of making meaningful utterances that elicit the intended response from, or have the intended effect upon, the hearer’ (Davidson 2002: 1275). Ultimately, interactants, including the interpreter, realign themselves as required by the turn-by-turn unfolding of the conversation by exploiting the politeness and face-saving strategies available at each stage in order to maximize the effectiveness of the ongoing interview or interrogation.

Studies such as those discussed above have drawn attention to interpreters’ active participation in the management of institutional interaction. At the same time, the vulnerability of interpreters to exercises of power by institutional representatives has received some attention from scholars interested in the workings of institutions that regulate the flow of asylum seekers and political refugees (Barsky 1996; Jacquemet 2005; Inghilleri 2007), from journalists reporting on the involvement of interpreters and translators in various wars (Levinson 2006; Packer 2007), and from professionals concerned about the welfare of interpreters operating in conflict zones (Kahane 2007). Interpreters working in the asylum system are often co-opted into the
relevant institutional cultures and made to assume responsibilities that lie outside their canonical role, for example by participating in the evaluation of the asylum applicant’s credibility, thus exacerbating their shifting perceptions of their own position as mediators within these structures of power. Similarly, interpreters working for the American troops in Iraq in the first decade of the twenty-first century were often assigned intelligence-gathering tasks that further alienated them from their local community and put their lives at greater risk (Packer 2007).

In addition to nationally based systems such as asylum, court and medical institutions, international organizations like the United Nations and the European Union also rely heavily on translators and interpreters. Indeed, they address their respective constituencies through translated and interpreted texts, such that ‘in a constructivist sense, the institution itself gets translated’ (Koskinen 2008: 22). One issue raised in the relatively small body of literature on international organizations available so far concerns efforts by these organizations to hide their translational character, and their subsequent effacement of the role played by translators and interpreters at different levels. On the one hand, translators’ and interpreters’ individual identities and contributions are diluted through the enforcement of collective workflow processes which serve to strengthen the public perception of the organizational voice. On the other hand, translators’ and interpreters’ ability to exercise their professional discretion is significantly restricted by means of institutional guidelines which seek to effect a gradual routinization and mechanization of translational behaviour and ensure that the language they produce ‘functions seamlessly as part of the discourse’ of the institution in question (Kang 2009: 144). Once again, despite the efforts of international organizations to develop translational cultures of their own, current research has identified a slippage between what translators and interpreters are officially expected or asked to do and what they actually do. This has been attributed to mismatches between institutional doctrine and ‘interpreting habituses’ (Marzocchi 2005) and to the growing impact of the economics of translation (i.e. time/costs factors), rather than socio-cultural policies, as the driving force behind institutional agendas (Mossop 2006). Mason ([2003] 2004: 481) also reports on the ‘little uniformity of practice or evidence of influence of institutional guidelines on translator behaviour’ that he found in his analysis of data from the European Parliament and UNESCO. His study suggests that institutional translators are responsible for numerous ‘discoursal shifts’, i.e. concatenations of small shifts in the use of transitivity patterns throughout the translated text, which result in attenuating or intensifying the message conveyed in the original text. Mason’s contention that such discoursal shifts display traces of the ideologies that circulate in the translators’ environment reinforces their interactional status as agents who are actively engaged in the production of institutional discourses, rather than simple mouthpieces whose role consists of consolidating ‘habitualized’ discourses through mechanistic practices of mediation.

**Power, inequality, minority**

Much of the current literature on translation and interpreting approaches cross-cultural encounters that involve an element of interlinguistic mediation as a space of radical inequality. Translators and interpreters mediating these encounters play a major role in asserting, questioning and sometimes forcefully resisting existing power structures. Viewed from this perspective, translation does not resolve conflict and inequality by enabling dialogue but rather constitutes a space of tension and power struggle in its own right. Casanova (2010), for example, examines translation as a factor in the struggle for legitimacy in the literary and political fields – a factor that participates in the consecration of authors and works, both nationally and internationally, and in the distribution and transfer of cultural capital. In her
model, structural inequality evident in the imbalance between dominating and dominated languages and literatures reflects the struggle within any field in Bourdieu’s terms. Inghilleri similarly draws on Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, field, capital and illusio to demonstrate that interpreters working in the asylum system ‘act within and are constituted by … power-laden macro-structures … that impact directly and indirectly on the interpreting activity’ (2003: 261).

Growing interest in issues of power and inequality has naturally drawn attention to the role played by translation and interpreting in shaping the relationship between minority and majority groups in any society. Translation has always been a powerful instrument of the nation-state, not only in colonial and postcolonial contexts (Niranjana 1990; Dodson 2005) but also in the context of more modern, multicultural and multi-ethnic societies. Minority issues become particularly acute, with translation and interpreting acquiring increased significance, in diglossic situations, where the dominant, colonial or majority language inhabits and has monopoly on official, public life, and where the native language is relegated to the realm of the home, the casual, the ephemeral. Cronin (1998) was among the first to stress the urgency of exploring the effects of translation on various minority languages given their diminishing numbers across the world. He distinguishes between translation efforts that seek to obliterate the minority language by assimilating it to the dominant language and those which seek to retain and develop the minority language and resist its incorporation into the dominant language. Examples of the former abound in the Irish experience and are brought to life vividly in Brian Friel’s Translations (Friel 1981), a play that depicts the process of anglicizing Ireland through the British Ordnance Survey in 1833. Examples of the latter include translation both from and into Welsh in many official contexts today, and translations undertaken from a wide range of prestigious literatures and languages into Scots in order to ‘raise its status and establish its validity as a literary medium’ (Corbett 1999: 3). Beyond the mere survival of the dominated language, translation into a minority language like Corsican is sometimes also ‘a way of demonstrating a new confidence in [that] language and identity by acting as if it were a language of power’ (Jaffe 1999: 264; original emphasis).

The deaf and hard-of-hearing are often treated as a minority group, and their interaction with the hearing community is seen as a site of power struggle in which translation and interpreting can play either an oppressive or empowering role. Those who are born deaf, in particular, generally do not acquire the majority language, or do not acquire it to native-speaker level, and because of their inability to hear they rely on interpreters throughout their life, and in a wide range of contexts. Improved access to interpreting services allows this particular minority group to participate more fully in various aspects of social life. It also improves their chances of advancing in their careers by using their own native, sign language in meetings and other face-to-face work encounters, rather than having to lip read, for instance. However, McKee (2003) warns that for various reasons to do with lack of cultural knowledge, issues of literacy, and the gap between the experience of the hearing interpreter and the deaf person, the mere provision of interpreting services can have a disempowering effect by creating an illusion of access or independence without necessarily putting the deaf person on an equal footing with their hearing co-interactants.

Translators and interpreters in the war zone

Scholars of translation have only recently begun to engage in a sustained manner with various aspects of the role and positioning of translators and interpreters in the war zone. Their focus has varied from an interest in the impact of interpreter and translator behaviour on other parties in the conflict, and the way they align or do not align with the institutions that employ
them (Jacquemet 2005; Baker 2006; Salama-Carr 2007), to the impact of the war situation and proximity to violence on the interpreters and translators themselves (Maier 2007; Inghilleri 2008, 2009; Stahuljak 2010).

Drawing on narrative theory, Baker (2006) demonstrates how the discursive negotiation of competing narratives of wars and armed conflicts is realized in and through acts of translation and interpreting in the media, literature, scholarly articles, documentary film, political reports and Websites. Rafael (2007) argues that in the case of armed conflicts, interpreters can become particularly involved on the ground and find themselves occupying precarious positions, often exposed to extreme discursive violence and distrusted by the very same parties which deployed them as instruments of surveillance. He examines the tensions and indeterminacy inherent in the positions that translators and interpreters occupy in the context of various wars. Despite their essential function in fighting insurgents, he argues, locally hired interpreters are also feared as potential insurgents themselves. Distrust of local interpreters and translators in the context of colonial expansion and armed conflict is well documented historically. Niranjana (1990) notes that the colonial governor of India, William Jones, and his British administrators found it ‘highly dangerous to employ the natives as interpreters, upon whose fidelity they could not depend’ (1990: 774), and that their remedy for this state of affairs was to substitute local interpreters and translators with British ones. Takeda (2009) similarly reports that interpreters and translators of Japanese origin were not used in code-breaking work in the USA during the Second World War for security reasons, and that their non-Japanese colleagues were secretly instructed to monitor them and to ensure that they were translating and interpreting accurately. Stahuljak (2010) offers a more extended and specific account of interpreting in contemporary war zones, with reference to the war in Croatia in the early 1990s.

Research on the role of translators and interpreters in mediating armed conflict suggests that they typically assume a wide range of tasks that extend well beyond any canonical definition of their responsibilities and obligations. Based on interviews with British and French journalists who worked in Iraq following its invasion by US troops in 2003, Palmer (2007) confirms that interpreters often selected the individuals to be interviewed by the media representative and advised on whether it was safe or practical to travel to a particular place to secure an interview. Takeda (2009: 52) states that second-generation Japanese Americans recruited and trained by the US military during the Second World War ‘translated captured enemy documents, interrogated Japanese prisoners of war, persuaded Japanese soldiers and civilians to surrender, and participated in propaganda activities’. Similar findings have emerged from the UK-based Languages at War Project, run by the University of Reading and the University of Southampton in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum.

Translation and interpreting in the globalized information society

Recent technological developments have made it possible to overcome spatial barriers and speed up the circulation of information. This ‘de-materialization of space’ (Cronin 2003) is responsible for the creation of supraterritorial readerships and audiences and accounts for the growing importance of instantaneity in the translation profession. Although these developments have strengthened the translation and interpreting industries in economic terms, the current literature on globalization has failed to engage meaningfully with the role that these forms of mediation play within the global deterritorialized space. As noted by Bielsa (2005), theorists of cultural globalization have tended to put a positive spin on the instantaneity of global flows and to assume uncritically that it allows a straightforward juxtaposition of cultures and spaces. The emphasis on the dynamics of instant circulation also glosses over the
problematic reliance of users and viewers on content in English as a lingua franca. Translation scholars have sought to tackle the complexity of this situation, either by attempting to establish how the dominant lingua franca influences other languages via processes of translation and multilingual text production, or by exploring the way in which translation can serve as a strategy of resistance against the linguistic and cultural dominance of English.

Bennett (2007) examines the role of translation in strengthening the position of English as a lingua franca in academic discourse, and hence in configuring knowledge and controlling the flow and format of information. Referring to the discourse routinely employed by academics and academic translators as ‘predatory’, she describes some of its main principles as follows: the discourse has to be clear and coherent; the language must be impartial and objective; the text has to be hierarchically organized into sections with a clear introduction, development and conclusion; the prose must be lucid, economical and precise; vagueness and verbosity must be avoided; impersonal structures, including use of the passive and nominalized forms, are preferred; and material and existential processes tend to dominate, reflecting a preoccupation with statements of fact and descriptions of actions. Bennett draws on examples of Portuguese academic articles translated for publication in English to demonstrate the extent to which the ideological framework that informs the original articles is disrupted and replaced by a positivist structure inherent to English academic discourse. She concludes that translators’ complicity in enforcing ideologies embedded in English academic discourse must be questioned since it can lead to the systematic destruction of rival forms of knowledge.

In studies conducted over the past decade, House (2004, 2008) explored the impact of English on a number of target languages more systematically by investigating the communicative norms operating in a wide range of texts translated from English and those operating in comparable texts written originally in the target language. In attempting to establish whether translation from English results in eroding the communicative norms of a target language, House assumes that, whether inadvertent or not, choices made in the course of translation either reinforce cultural diversity or participate in imposing Anglo-Saxon norms on other cultures under the guise of ‘universalism’. Although the studies conducted so far have not produced clear-cut evidence, they suggest that textual norms in languages other than English are likely to be adapted to Anglophone ones, ‘particularly in the use of certain functional categories that express subjectivity and audience design’ (House 2008: 87). Such adaptations include shifts from the ideational (message-oriented) to the interpersonal (addressee-oriented) function of language, from informational explicitness to inference-inducing implicitness, and from ‘densely packed information to loosely linearized information’ (House 2004: 49).

Another aspect of the interface between globalization and translation which has attracted growing scholarly attention is the impact of new information and communication technologies on the way we use and conceptualize language, including translational practices. The instantaneousness of global flows resulting from technological advances is often an oppressive factor forcing translators to produce assignments within increasingly short response periods. According to Cronin (1998), technology-driven instantaneousness generates pressure on translation to become a uniform, transparent medium of fluid exchange: as professionals struggle to translate more and faster, the communicative norms and specialized terminology of dominant languages are more likely to find their way into the target texts, thus gradually eroding the native resources. But the effects of technology can be more specific, particularly in the context of machine translation systems and translation memory tools. As Raley (2003) explains, machine translation technologies place particular emphasis on functionality and utilitarianism: reasonably accurate and functional draft translations are thus only feasible when the input is
basic, and when both input and output are restricted in terms of style, vocabulary, figurative expression and content. Unsurprisingly, given its centrality to technological developments, English is the language which has most informed the design of input entry protocols in machine translation, thus further contributing to the growing hegemony of this language and its communicative norms. The privileging of English modes of expression in the context of machine translation, however, can also be resisted. As suggested by Raley (2003), the ‘broken’ English which makes up machine translation input and output lends itself to ‘free’ adaptation by native and non-native speakers alike. Ultimately, free adaptation can contribute to severing the link between English and specific geophysical spaces as well as undermining collective identities based on this link. Beyond machine translation as such, translation memory tools have also been found to impact our use of language in a number of ways. Translating in this environment, for instance, involves the mechanical segmentation of the source text into translation ‘units’. Translators are thus prompted to use the same number of segments in the target language, which often results in the erosion of cohesion resources and, more widely, a partial excision of the rhetorical element of language.

Technological advances have also stimulated interest in the diversity of resources that can be used to create texts. In addition to the spoken and written word, different semiotic modalities such as gestures, visuals and music are often co-deployed within a multimodal text to create meaning. Although the study of multimodal translational behaviour has traditionally focused on the subtitling and dubbing of films and other audiovisual broadcasts, attention is increasingly shifting towards new areas of multimodal mediation, often involving the transfer of meaning across semiotic modes. These include subtitling and interpreting for the hard of hearing and the deaf, as well as the audio description of films for the blind. Audio description consists of a spoken account of those visual aspects of a film which play a role in conveying its plot, rather than a translation of linguistic content (Pérez-González 2009).

Recent changes in the audiovisual landscape, including the development of digitization techniques and emergence of new patterns in the distribution and consumption of audiovisual products, have encouraged the emergence of interventionist practices such as ‘fansubbing’, whether for aesthetic or political reasons. Unhappy with the shortage and cultural insensitivity of commercial translations of their favourite audiovisual programmes and genres, networks of fans, known as fansubbers, produce their own subtitled versions which are then circulated globally through Internet-based channels. In order to allow their fellow fans to experience the cultural ‘otherness’ of the programme they are subtitling, these amateur translators exploit traditional meaning-making codes in a creative manner and criss-cross the traditional boundaries between linguistic and visual semiotics in innovative ways. For example, they use ‘headnotes’ and written glosses at the top of the screen to expand or elaborate on the meaning of ‘untranslatable’ cultural references in the film dialogue; the cultural references in question still feature untranslated within the ‘traditional subtitle’ displayed simultaneously at the bottom of the screen. Fansubbers also favour the ‘dilution’ of subtitles within the image: technological developments allow them to display subtitles in unusual angles, perspectives and fonts which blend in with the aesthetics of the film, thus maximizing the viewer’s enjoyment of the visuals (Pérez-González 2006b). But subtitling is also being increasingly appropriated by politically engaged groups without formal training in translation to undermine the socio-economic structures that sustain global capitalism. Pérez-González (2010) describes how these communities of politicized ‘non-translators’ capitalize on the potential of networked communication to circulate translations of audiovisual content that would otherwise be only available in English. This interventionist engagement of activist communities represents a challenge to the control that media corporations have traditionally exerted over the distribution and reception
of their news programmes: audiovisual content mediated by activists often takes on new resonances when displaced from the global circuits it was originally intended for and watched by a national audience with a specific take on what is reported.

**Concluding remarks**

The prevalence and pervasiveness of translation and interpreting in all areas of social interaction have important consequences for society as a whole, as this entry has attempted to demonstrate. More specifically, their impact is also being felt in the academy. Translation and interpreting are increasingly being acknowledged as core areas of research. Rather than a subfield of linguistics or cultural studies, translation studies has become an interdisciplinary field in its own right. Its remit encompasses, extends and surpasses a range of issues with which other disciplines have traditionally engaged from different perspectives. As it continues to develop in the twenty-first century, many scholars now believe that its next and most consequential challenge is to shed its Eurocentric origins and prepare to embrace the variety of theoretical perspectives, experiences and traditions that the West’s many ‘others’ have to offer. This challenge is already being undertaken, with a growing number of voices of non-Western scholars continuing to gain strength and calling into question much of our received wisdom in the field (Hung and Wakabayashi 2005; Cheung 2006; Bandia 2008; Selim 2009).

**Related topics**

corpus linguistics; critical discourse analysis; culture; discourse analysis; identity; institutional discourse; linguistic imperialism; medical communication; migration; multimodal communication; sign language; the media

**Further reading**


Munday, J. (2001) *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, London and New York: Routledge. (Munday provides a balanced and accessible overview of the main theoretical strands in the discipline, supported by illustrative case studies in different languages, suggestions for further reading and a list of discussion and research points.)


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