

## Target-cultural ‘facts’ – Do they really exist? A critical assessment of Toury’s Descriptive Translation Studies

Akkad Alhussein  
Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

Received: 25/04/2019  
Accepted: 14/04/2020

### *Abstract*

Gideon Toury pioneered Descriptive Translation Studies as a science based on observation, (re)defining translation as a target-cultural ‘fact’ and, thus, shifting the focus to the translation as a product which can and should be studied without any methodological presumptions. However, this proves illusive, as it falsely supposes neutrality in research. Arguing that there could be no strict separation between description and evaluation, I will argue that— if we are to fully understand its complex nature—translation cannot be properly viewed as an exclusively target-cultural phenomenon. An overview of some alternative concepts that allow a more balanced perspective will be given.

### *Key Words*

Gideon Toury, Descriptive Translation Studies, descriptivism/empiricism, subjectivity/objectivity, target-orientedness.



### *1. Introduction*

Translation theory has traditionally seen its main task as well as source of legitimacy in the formulation of general principles and rules and the description of ‘appropriate translation methods’ (Newmark, 1981: 19) as problem solving strategies and procedures that would give the translator orientation during the translation process and guide the transition from source text (ST) to target text (TT). Other scholars like Wilss (1982: 158) consider in view of the rigorously

posed question of the social relevance of knowledge the ‘raison d’être’ of the science of translation endangered “if it did not succeed in combining theoretical, descriptive and applied research perspectives into an integrated [...] research paradigm.”<sup>1</sup> The influence of instrumental thinking and application-orientedness in Translation Studies (TS) has been so prevalent that theoreticians, as Dizdar (2006: 231-32; my trans.) remarks, often had almost to ‘apologize’ if their thoughts and insights did not contribute to the practice providing ‘guidelines for the production of translations’.

This gave rise in the eighties of the last century to new developments leading to the establishment of a target-oriented paradigm shifting the attention from linguistic to sociocultural problems and aspects of translation and translating (e.g. Vermeer, 1978; Holz-Mänttari, 1984; Hermans, 1985; Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990; Reiß & Vermeer, 1991). One of the leading approaches characteristic of this line of thought is what became among specialists widely known as Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) (also known as ‘manipulation school’). In the famous collection of essays *The Manipulation of Literature*, Hermans (1985: 10-11) describe this new paradigm as an “approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-oriented, functional, and systemic.”

The most important representative of this approach and the one who has contributed mostly to it is the well known Israeli scholar and theorist Gideon Toury whose *In Search of a theory of translation* (1980)<sup>2</sup> contains the first systematic attempt at articulating TS as a branch of knowledge based on empirical principles pertaining to science. Like other target- and functionally oriented scholars (most notably Vermeer and Holz-Mänttari), Toury took as his point of departure the criticism of the early theories and models which he saw as prescriptive, as they focused on the process of translation as achieving a kind of optimal equivalence between ST and TT. Abandoning them as “merely speculative entities resulting from preconceived hypotheses and theoretical models” (1995: 1), while at the same time calling for the necessity of a ‘proper descriptive branch’ of TS based on ‘description’, ‘explanation’ and ‘prediction’ and concerned with translations as ‘facts of real life’, Toury’s declared purpose was to get rid of restrictive, normative<sup>3</sup> definitions and hypotheses prevailing in the discipline and to open up the object of study to all historical phenomena. The main goal is to search for and establish regularities and/or rules of

---

<sup>1</sup> Regarding Translation Studies as ‘utility discipline’ (*Nützlichkeitsdisziplin*) see Dizdar (2012).

<sup>2</sup> For a critical overview of this volume see Hermans (1995).

<sup>3</sup> I am using *normative* in the sense of *prescriptive*, not in the (descriptive) sense used by Chesterman (1993, 2000).

translational behaviour. Thus, Toury brought to the fore translations as observable products from which inferences could be made about the translation process, laying the grounds for an approach “which focuses on existing translations rather than on hypothetical ones, on actual products rather than on the process of translation [...] and on a priori ‘translatability’” (Toury, 1980: 7).

On the other side, the notion of translation as a target-cultural ‘fact’ was frequently criticized by translation scholars (e.g. Gutt, 1991: 5-8; Hermans, 1995; Venuti, 1999: 27-30; Dizdar, 2000; Ivir, 2004; Pym, 2010: 64-89), as it ignores the interpretative role of the individual researcher and is, in addition, based on an ideal concept of sociocultural systems as definite, unified entities with clear borders and homogenous linguistic and cultural existence. This does not, however, reflect empirical life, as there exist beyond and alongside systems and system borderlines diverse forms of coexistence and parallelity. Translation in the context of international and European law—even though the national legal languages have to be taken into account—takes place on the basis of a unified legal system, making the comparison of source- and target-language factors, if not completely obsolete, then at least not sufficient (Sandrini, 2004: 171-72). Here, the assumption of a linear transfer from an independent, autonomous sociocultural entity to another seems to lack justification. Indeed, the new ‘global intercultural’ (ibid.) in which today’s experts act parallel to monolingual spaces demands rethinking traditional concepts, especially the ‘transcultural mediation function’ of translation:

If globalization erases the borders between the individual national cultures leading to the arising of new social identification communities on the global level, the theoretical conception of translation as a transcultural mediator must also be relativized. (Sandrini, 2004: 171; my trans.)

On similar grounds, Pym questions the purposefulness of the target reader as reference point for translational action:

[W]hen I translate children’s stories into English, most of the expressions that come to me from my own regional childhood are automatically censored because I have no idea what kind of English my target reader will be speaking. My target language is nowhere, and this worries me. (Pym, 1996: 174)

These statements make clear the need to relativize some methodological suppositions regarding the role of source and target language and the functionality of the (radical) target-cultural viewpoint which seems to ignore complex situations. In the following, I will investigate some of the basic

assumptions of DTS, especially the concept of translation as a target-cultural ‘fact’ and the possibility of pure descriptions. After introducing Toury’s target-oriented and descriptive approach, issues like the definition of translation, subjectivity/objectivity and descriptivism in translational research and the target-oriented nature of translation will be discussed in more depth. It will be shown that a clear-cut separation between the descriptive and interpretative (or evaluative) dimension is not really possible and that neutral descriptions are rather an illusion researchers have to free themselves from. On that basis, some theoretical approaches and concepts will be highlighted that could potentially constitute an alternative for translational research. The paper will conclude with an overall assessment of Toury’s contributions and an argument to go beyond the limits of the target system.

## *2. Deconstructing the target-cultural definition of translation*

### *2.1. When is a translation a translation?*

Toury (1995) draws on Holmes’s (2004[1972]) famous map of the discipline of Translation Studies, which the latter divides into a descriptive and applied branch with theoretical and descriptive TS representing together the ‘pure’ discipline. Like Holmes, Toury departs from the three aspects of ‘function’, ‘process’ and ‘product’ of translation but stresses—in distinction from Holmes—the mutual interdependence of each of these aspects in relation to the others. In addition, Toury—unlike Holmes—does not consider applied TS (because of its inherent prescriptivity) as part of the discipline in the strict sense of the word (although applied TS can indirectly—via ‘bridging rules’—profit from the discipline). The underlying assumption is that it is not the task of an intellectual branch of study “to effect changes in the world of our experience” (ibid.: 17). The most important factor is the ‘function’ or ‘position’ a text is intended to (or does really) fulfill in the system of the target culture and which determines the strategies resorted to in the translation act. As the activity of translation is “a *teleological* activity by its very nature” (1995: 14), translators are considered agents of the recipient culture. From this perspective, the ‘logical priority’ of function in relation to the other aspects of process and product remains untouched, even though the translation strategy

and the linguistic/textual realization of the product might itself influence the position ultimately assigned to a text in the recipient system.

The translation's position and/or function is, according to Toury, related to and dependent on target-cultural considerations and circumstances. The crucial point is that "something is missing in the target culture which should have been there" (1995: 27). Seen this way, translation is "a major way of filling in gaps" (ibid.). Although translations can build a subsystem therein, they remain 'facts' of the host culture:

Translations are facts of target cultures; on occasion facts of a special status, sometimes even constituting identifiable (sub)systems of their own, but of the target culture in any event. (ibid.: 29)

The original text's position does not reflect that of the translation, Toury argues. The relevant position is "the one a translation was designed to occupy when it first came into being" (1995: 30), because it is also this position which governs the translation act. A translation could though assume a position in the recipient system different from the one it was initially intended to have. It would be then the task of a researcher "to confront the position which is *actually* assumed by a translation with the one it was *intended* to have, and draw the necessary conclusions" (ibid.: 14).

The relevant perspective is that of the source-culture recipients as 'persons-in-the-culture'. The decisive factor is their acknowledgement of the text *as* a translation, which can be done with reference to certain textual features pertinent to this specific class regardless of the existence of a ST—which is why pseudotranslations (original texts which are wrongly presented or received as translations) can for example pass for real ones. This perspective should make it possible to approach the object of study without methodological presumptions regarding what is to be (or not) considered as a translation. The researcher only assumes that there has been a text in another language (source-text postulate) from which a new text was derived (transfer postulate) which shares now something with its original (relationship postulate) (1995: 33-35). The three postulates constitute together the notion of 'assumed translation' which serves as "*working hypothesis* providing guidelines for the establishment of corpuses for studies [...]" (ibid.: 32).

Toury does not regard his concept, which can be said to constitute a loose '(un)definition' (see Hermans, 1999: 46) of translation, as an 'alternative definition' of the object of translation theory (*Gegenstand der Translationswissenschaft*), as suggested by Koller (1990, 2011: 209-12). Instead, he

refers to the methodological advantages it brings regarding the scope and extent of translational research. Thus, pseudotranslations would, for example, emerge as legitimate objects of study, at least “until the mystification has been dispelled” (1995: 34). They function, as Toury (ibid.) states, in the recipient system as authentic translations. On the other hand, genuine translations that are not explicitly presented or received as translations would still constitute legitimate objects, “but an account will have to be given precisely of the fact that they were *not* presented/regarded as translational within the culture which hosts them” (ibid.: 32-33), the question being “why something was, or was not, presented/regarded as translational [...]” (ibid.: 33). The nature of the translation relationship considered as required and/or sufficient in the host culture is not predetermined and must be established during a study.

This implies a universalist conception of translation which seems to be valid beyond language and culture borders: Even if a specific culture does not have a special category for translation, the concept would still remain functional. However, this ought to be made explicit and the researcher would have to look for explanations for this absence. As such, the concept is characterized by its ‘functional operativity’ (Toury 1995: 33; see also 1985: 23), which is given, according to Toury, irrespective of the functionality of the translation concept of the culture in question. The question is not what translation generally is, but what it proves (or is likely) to be under certain conditions. Ultimately, the target-culture recipient alone decides what is (or is not) to be seen as a translation:

Within our frame of reference, the assumption is applied to *assumed* translations: that is, to all utterances which are presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on no matter what grounds. (1995: 32)

Toury seems, as Gutt (1991) says, to generalize his own Eurocentric view of translation, making a priori assumptions irrespective of cultural differences regarding the term ‘translation’. He assumes “that people of any culture universally realize that they translate when they translate” (1991: 7). Such an assumption would, however, only be possible under reference to another culturally specific category as a measure or basis for comparison. Otherwise there would be “no a priori reason for relating and [sic!] English ‘translation’ to a German ‘Übersetzung’ or to an Amharic ‘tirgum’” (ibid).

That the notion of assumed translation is a relative one can be seen from the fact that a researcher might principally always deactivate this criterion, as they can always refer to the non-operativity or non-existence of the category

translation in a specific sociocultural entity, thus activating their own (culturally bound) interpretation where there is no such reference in the recipient culture. It is only by this means that we can explain why so-called 'pseudo-originals', concealed or non-marked translations which are not explicitly presented/received as translations or which are presented as originals (see Koller, 2011: 212 or Pym, 1998: 60), are effectively not excluded as potential research items, even though they are not regarded as translations by the target culture. Similarly, the acknowledgement of the text's translational status through the target recipient as person-in-the-culture seems unnecessary when the translation is *not* accepted or received as a translation by the recipient system: The logical priority of the prospective function does not lose its validity even in cases

[...] when the position occupied by a translation in the target culture, or its ensuing functions, happen to differ from the ones it was initially 'designed' to have; e.g., when the translation of a literary work, intended to serve as a literary text too and translated in a way which should have suited that purpose, is nevertheless rejected by the target literary system, or relegated to a position which it was not designed to occupy. (Toury, 1995: 14)

Obviously, the text does not (always) have to function as a translation or be recognized by the target-culture system as such. In spite of that, we assume here a translational research object. It would be the task of a researcher to confront the intended position with the real one and look for suitable explanations (*ibid.*). Interestingly, this does not apply in cases where the translation exerts influence on the source language and culture or the source text itself:

There is no way a translation could share the same systemic space with its original [...]. This is not to say that, having been severed from it, a translation would never be in a position to bear on the source culture again, on occasion even on the source text itself. Texts, and hence the cultural systems which host them, have been known to have been affected by translations of theirs. It is nonetheless significant that any such practice involves a reversal of role, in full accordance with our starting point: which genetically a translation, the affecting entity no longer functions\* as one. (Toury, 1995: 26; \*: my emph.)<sup>4</sup>

It is not clear why the same logic as in the previous situation should not be valid here. From an empirical point of view, relating translational

---

<sup>4</sup> Toury (1980: 82f, also 1985: 18) had previously denied that translations could have any influence on the source language or text.

functionality/operativity one-sidedly to the recipient system while denying any such relevance to the source is not readily justifiable. Furthermore, this stance is based on other premises which are themselves questionable. It is, for instance, *de facto* assumed that these influences are not purposeful or intended. This, however, might be quite misleading as these ‘back effects’ might in certain constellations be wanted for their own sake (for example as an attempt to actively influence the way a text is interpreted in the source culture),<sup>5</sup> which needless to say would also influence the translation process and the implemented (translation) strategies. The researcher could also confront such divergences with the intended function and look for suitable explanations, which would ultimately lead to a better understanding of intercultural exchange processes and their interdependencies.

One can, in view of these examples, safely assume that Toury’s position is constructed. That is, it reflects—rather than an essential feature of translation itself—a pretheoretical, *a priori* decision in favour of the target-oriented perspective which would also remain valid if, for example, the transfer—as in the colonial situation, “where the ‘exchange’ is far from equal and the ‘benefaction’ highly dubious” (Niranjana, 1992: 59)<sup>6</sup>—is initiated by a “patron of sorts who also purports to ‘know better’ how that gap may best be filled” (1995: 27).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the target-cultural standpoint has to be always privileged regardless of the circumstances that characterize an individual translation act.

This leads to the conclusion that the recognition of translational status by the target-cultural system does not alone qualify as a solid criteria for determining the operative and empirical functionality of translations and is, therefore, not sufficient as a starting hypothesis for translational research. Indeed, Toury’s refusal to acknowledge the notion of assumed translation as a sort of definition is itself an indication to the fluid and self-referential nature of the concept which ultimately fails to explain (without recourse to some predetermined and culturally specific conception) why a given text, be it regarded by the target system as a translation or not, functions the way it does and have a different

---

<sup>5</sup> A very good example is the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen whose reception in Denmark was decisively influenced by his Success in Germany. Research has highlighted Andersen’s active role in this process (see especially Möller-Christensen, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Niranjana is referring to Steiner (1975).

<sup>7</sup> Niranjana (1992: 49-63) sees in Toury’s approach an example for what she considers the ‘blindness’ and ‘naivety’ of Translation Studies due to an “empiricist-idealist conceptual framework that [...] upholds the premises of humanism” (ibid.: 50) and ignores the asymmetrical relations of power between languages.



significance in different contexts regardless of readers' perception of it. Hence, Toury's approach does not finally solve the problem of how, or according to which criteria, a researcher would delimit their object of study without being already involved in everyday interpretations or preconceived hypotheses regarding this object, which necessarily entails a kind of normative reasoning as well.

### *2.2. Are there neutral descriptions?*

I want now to discuss another question which is essential in any critical investigation of DTS: the relationship of description and prescription and the possibility of a sharp separation between facts and values. Toury, as we saw, demands objectivity on the part of the researcher and makes this a criterion for judging the quality of individual studies which have to remain in their conception and execution free from any value judgment and/or personal presumption. The universalist logic entailed here, i.e., of pure, objective knowledge, needs to be challenged.

A central position in DTS is assumed by the study of translation norms whose formulation ought to substitute the normative discourse and is seen as the most important task of Translation Studies in its theoretical and descriptive facet. Through describing translational phenomena, DTS seeks to predict translational behaviour, leading to the establishment of 'translation laws' as "the ultimate goal of the discipline in its theoretical facet" (1995: 16).

How important the concept of norms is for DTS can be seen in the concept of equivalence (or the 'invariant under transformation') which ought to help the researcher identify the translation concept underlying a translation or group of translations. Toury admits the prescriptive nature of the concept. However, instead of dropping it altogether he decides to redefine it "from an ahistorical, largely prescriptive concept to a historical one" designating "any relation which is found to have characterized translation under a specified set of circumstances" (1995: 61). Although no single translation relationship is per se regarded as exclusively legitimate or necessary, one still has to assume some kind of identity between ST and TT, which is reflected in the continuous search for 'translation shifts' as stances of deviance from an expected norm. Therefore, it is not conceivable how the ST-TT comparison could be carried out without resorting to normative categories as to what is to be considered an acceptable form of realization (see Koller, 2011: 211).

The missing link is provided by translation norms: “[I]t is norms”, Toury (1995: 61) postulates, “that determine the (type and extent of) equivalence manifested by actual translations.” and which is regarded as sufficient or necessary for the translation relationship in a certain culture. Verbal statements and formulations which apparently describe norms without prescribing them must, however, be viewed critically by the researcher as they could be covertly prescriptive, trying ultimately to influence the norms:

One thing to bear in mind, when setting out to study norm-governed behaviour, is that there is no necessary identity between the norms themselves and any formulation of them in language. Verbal formulations of course reflect *awareness* of the existence of norms as well as of their respective significance. However, they also imply other interests, particularly a desire to *control* behaviour – i.e., to dictate norms rather than merely account for them. Normative formulations tend to be slanted, then, and should always be taken with a grain of salt. (1995: 55)

Toury, as we can see here, is aware of the potentially prescriptive character of any verbal account of norms. Nonetheless, the subjective perspective of the researcher themselves and their personal involvement is not taken into consideration, insisting on the possibility of objective descriptions and a strict separation between description and evaluation. This clearly discourages the researcher from questioning and becoming aware of their personal motivations as they set out to study normative behaviour or formulate translation norms. Indeed, “there is no reason”, Venuti (1999: 28) says regarding Toury’s observation, “why that last sentence couldn’t apply as well to a translation scholar formulating the norms that govern a body of translations (or Toury’s desire to conceptualize translation studies and thereby control the behaviour of translation scholars).”

The concept of assumed translation postulates neutrality on the part of the researcher who seemingly only has to (objectively) observe and register the reader’s perception without actively taking part in it, i.e., without being himself (directly) involved in the interpretation process. Thus, the researcher seems to make no value judgment regarding the object of study as the reader themselves is responsible for this assignment, which is, in effect, a delegation (rather than solution) of the definition problem. Through referring back to the target reader’s interpretation, a researcher is basically shifting the responsibility away from themselves as an individual and transferring it to an external authority, thus giving the (false) impression of personal disinterest and detachment. The fact that it is the target recipient and not the scholar themselves or someone

else (say e.g. the author, commissioner, critic, etc.) who makes this judgment is, however, itself a decision made a priori by the scholar. In other words, it is a value judgment which cannot be inferred, justified or explained without recourse to some kind of interpretative activity beyond the purely theoretical/objective level. Ivir attracts our attention to an interesting analogy in descriptive and prescriptive grammar:

It is not difficult to conclude that descriptive grammars have obvious advantages over prescriptive grammars, but it is equally important to note the following paradox: The best prescriptive grammars are those which are based on solid descriptive evidence, and the best descriptive grammars are those which are sufficiently sensitive to usage variation to warn their readers of the consequences of their choices (thus equally prescribing their linguistic behaviour). (Ivir, 2004: 276)

This shows that a researcher (who interferes through organization and selection procedures and through interpretative stances) cannot possibly assume a neutral position in regard to the object of study, especially as the adoption of the performative/pragmatic perspective of the target-cultural recipient does not ultimately protect them from the inevitability of making value judgments and ascribing (consciously or unconsciously) certain qualities to the objects they are studying. This is especially true in view of translation norms and their descriptions which might well be manipulated by the scholar in view of certain ideological interests and against the background of a certain world view. The desire to establish universal translation laws that would enable us to make ever more precise and accurate predictions can itself be seen as a latent, more complex and intricate form of social and/or ethical control, bestowing on these occurrences the status of a 'law of nature'. "In fact", Ivir (ibid.: 282) writes critically, "at the peak of sophistication, with all the variables duly specified, description and prescription would come together." A descriptive study can finally never be completely neutral or free from value judgments, as Arrojo makes clear:

If all research is necessarily mediated by the subjects and the circumstances that produce it, no study of translation can claim to be purely 'objective', neutral or even 'descriptive'. Moreover, 'if interpretive hypotheses underlie any conceptual analysis', and if 'all descriptive research is based on some kind of conceptual analysis', [...] we cannot by any means claim to clearly separate the descriptive from the interpretive. And, if we cannot do so, we will never have a general theory of translation that could be universally acceptable once and for all. (Chesterman & Arrojo, 2000: 158)

*3. Going beyond the target system*

As we have seen, it is for Toury sufficient that a text is presented or identified as a translation by the recipient system in order to be regarded by a researcher as such. It is, according to the concept of ‘assumed translation’, up to the target-cultural reader as person-in-the-culture to mark a text as having the specific quality ‘translation’, thus providing the researcher with the first indication they need as their starting point.

I have argued above that this stance is methodologically insufficient, as it does not reflect the functional or operative nature of translated texts as effective entities. It is obvious that translations exist and function in their sociocultural environment regardless of any translational interpretation on the part of individual agents, be they readers, translators, authors or any other agent involved in the production and circulation of translated texts.<sup>8</sup> Any attempt to describe, classify and categorize translations as linguistic and cultural products would necessarily entail methodological presumptions regarding what is to be considered as a translation, contrary to what is suggested by the notion of translations as target-cultural ‘facts’—as these ‘facts’ do not exist on their own prior to any interpretational activity of some sort. In this sense, any endeavour to ‘describe’ translation norms must be considered to some extent normative, not only or simply saying what the norms ‘are’, but also privileging certain types of behaviour and excluding other ones, hence influencing the conception and development of norms. But what other options are there if we are to abandon the empiricist stance represented by Toury? I now want to briefly point to some other directions and approaches in Translation Studies which could potentially offer an alternative for translational research.

Departing from his criticism of the Anglo-American tradition of fluent translations, Venuti (1999) advocates a cultural-materialistic approach based on the concept of the ‘remainder’, understood as these linguistic and aesthetic/literary variations which are marginalized by canonical expression forms but which have their own value in language as a heterogeneous system. The consequence thereof is for Venuti the critical and self-aware practice of ‘minoritizing translation’, i.e., the translation of “foreign texts that possess minority status in their cultures” (ibid.: 10) as a way to defy canonical forms

---

<sup>8</sup> For a thorough and philosophically founded critique of Toury’s restriction of translation to an ‘expert interpretation’ see Heller (2013).

and foster diversity in cultural and literary discourses of dominant languages like English. The integration of the concept in and its application to (the study of) translation does not mean sacrificing scientific objectivity;<sup>9</sup> “it rather offers a way to articulate and clarify—in terms that are textual and social—the ethical and political dilemmas that translators face when working in any situation” (ibid.: 30).

Some scholars have naturally sought help from other disciplines and fields of study in the humanities and social sciences, looking for new concepts and frameworks to situate and theorize translation as a medium of intercultural exchange and communication. Tymoczko (2010), for example, borrows from anthropology the concept of “transculturation” (referred to also as “acculturation”), understood as “interchange and amalgamation of cultural characteristics” (ibid.: 123) between different sociocultural groups, to describe translation as a mode of cultural interface. Textual and literary models, conventions, expression forms, discourses, concepts, technologies and innovations (whether they are material or immaterial) are exchanged, i.e., ‘transcultured’, which requires the “performance of the borrowed cultural forms in the receptor environment” (ibid.: 121). Thus, in contrast to categories like ‘representation’, ‘transference’ or ‘transmission’, the notion highlights the performative aspect of usage and implementation (irrespective of origin or authenticity of representation) of cultural items as well as the bidirectionality or ‘two-way nature’ (ibid.: 126) of intercultural relations (which seems not always to be conveyed by the term ‘acculturation’).<sup>10</sup>

Another interesting approach which also emphasizes the hybrid nature of cultural relations and the complex ways translators and translations act as agents of change and creativity between and over the borderlines of cultural systems is Pym’s (1998, 2002) concept of ‘interculture’, defined as “beliefs and practices found in intersections or overlaps of cultures, where people combine something of two or more cultures at once” (1998: 177). According to Pym, translators as a specific group of intercultural agents have a special, intermediary position in the sociocultural context they act in, forming linguistic and cultural regions of intersection. Interculturality, which Toury (1995: 28) rejects as “totally unthinkable”, is defined in such a manner “so that translators

---

<sup>9</sup> In her discussion of interpretative constraints, Brownlie (2003) suggests that ‘committed’ (postcolonial, cultural-materialist, and feminist) approaches do not seem to necessarily restrict interpretation more than ‘critical descriptive approaches’.

<sup>10</sup> As an example, Tymoczko mentions James Joyce’s amalgamation of traditional Irish poetic conventions with features of English narrative in his writings, especially in *Ulysses*.

can potentially be associated with intersections between cultures” without reducing the concept to mere bilinguality or that everything becomes automatically an interculture (Pym, 1998: 183). The point of departure and the main concern in writing translation history is not the translator as a faceless carrier of systemic functions but as a human being with a *body*,<sup>11</sup> “the human translator as a sociolinguistic figure” (1998: 183). “Translators”, Pym (ibid.: 181-82) states, “*are* intersections”. Their material existence “gives basic substance to interculturality” (ibid.). This implies a movement towards the ‘middle’, in the direction of the material translator as a ‘minimal’ interculture.<sup>12</sup>

From another (more empirically oriented) perspective, Chesterman (1993, 2000) proposes to combine both aspects of description and evaluation in one comprehensive approach which he calls descriptive-normative. According to him, it is not sufficient to describe all regularities of translational behaviour indiscriminately. The study of the behaviour of an inexperienced translator would be “*qua* translation-theoretical study, just as valid as the study of the behaviour of a competent professional” (1993: 3-4), which would lead to a “*one-legged theory*” (ibid.) that ignores the real motivations of translational research. The transition from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ is again achieved through the concept of norms. The translation norms should reflect the target culture’s qualitative expectations and ought therefore to be established on the basis of the practice of ‘competent professional translators’ acknowledged as such by society (ibid.: 7-8). The task of descriptive research in TS is thus “to describe the behaviour of a subset of individuals who are taken to represent a desired professional standard, and to describe a subset of texts that are similarly taken by their readers to represent a desired standard” (ibid.: 11). In this way, ‘oughts’ are formulated on the basis of descriptions, thus enhancing ‘norm-refining’ (ibid.: 14).

Finally, one very interesting approach that needs to be mentioned in this context and which goes beyond target-cultural considerations and hypotheses regarding the motivations of translation processes and the different historical and communicative settings they are embedded in is Dollerup’s (1997) concept of translation as ‘imposition’ vs. ‘requisition’. The logic behind this distinction is self-explanatory and self-contained. It simply means that translation is either initiated, i.e. ‘imposed’, by the source culture regarding its own communicative

---

<sup>11</sup> Regarding the translator as body, see Robinson’s (1991) somatic approach.

<sup>12</sup> Pym (1998: 180) mentions as examples Moses Mendelssohn as well as André Lefevere’s (1992) discussion of subversive literary and philosophical translation practices in cities on the periphery of 19th-century France, like Amsterdam or Strasbourg.

purposes or, alternatively, it is 'wanted', i.e. 'requisitioned', by the receptor culture according to its specific needs and in view of its own benefit:

When translation is forced upon source texts, their realisations in target cultures will vary from being 'imposed' by the source culture to being 'requisitioned', that is wanted, desired, by target cultures. [...] 'Imposition' is normally deliberate; it is always driven by the source culture, often with little regard for the receptor culture, and therefore pays much attention to the intention or intentionalities behind the original text manifestation; 'requisition' springs from the target culture and therefore implies a more relaxed attitude towards the sender's intentionality. (Dollerup, 1997: 46-47)

Religious scriptures as well as political and technological texts are, according to Dollerup, typical examples of imposition which is dominant in international relations and trade including sales promotion material and other product-accompanying documents such as advertisements, brochures, user manuals, recipes, etc. "In these cases", Dollerup (1997: 47) remarks, "sending languages have dominated, and generally speaking, 'initiators' and translators tend to agree that there should be loyalty to the sender." Dollerup indicates a change in attitude regarding how fidelity is realized, stating that producers and service providers have come to recognize "that they must bow to the language and culture in foreign markets if they want to sell their products" (ibid.). On the other hand, scientific, pedagogical and literary texts tend more towards being requisitioned by the receptor, which is especially true of literary texts where "successful translation is characterised by an overall requisitioning attitude" (ibid.: 48).

Dollerup's approach allows both perspectives, that of the source and that of the target culture, to be equally considered in analyzing the dynamics of intercultural exchange and the relationship between both sides of the translation process—although it is not necessary (or even methodologically justifiable) to link a certain type of text, whether literary, religious or commercial, to one specific model, as his typology suggests. The distinction between translation as requisition and translation as imposition makes clear the fact that translation is not solely or mainly determined by target-cultural considerations and the needs of target-cultural recipients and that the communicative interests and intentions of the source text and the source-cultural sender/producer are indeed not less relevant for explaining why texts are translated and why they are translated the way they are translated. Thus, the model has a decisive advantage over Toury's one-sided, target-oriented approach which does not at all take source-cultural factors into account.

As we can see from these examples, the motivations involved in translation and which inform translational strategies and choices are much more complex than to be readily reduced to one aspect. We can also state as a result that there is—despite any claim to the contrary—no real contradiction between a source-und target-cultural perspective on translation. The two perspectives are in fact complementary and cannot be thought in isolation from one another. Any theoretical conception of translation is in this sense necessarily constructed as it will always to some extent reflect our historical circumstances and personal attitudes. This does not mean that we should not propose or work with such concepts. It rather means that we as critical and self-aware researchers take responsibility through acknowledging our own involvement and our active role in shaping the object(s) we deal with.

I have mentioned some examples for approaches which would constitute alternative frameworks that could help us positively challenge and transcend traditional boundaries and one-sided definitions. They open up interesting perspectives and pose new kinds of questions for translational research. These efforts need to be continued and built upon constructively to reach more effective hypotheses and better, i.e., more critical, explanation categories. What characterizes translation is not only the teleological aspect. It is not enough for Translation Studies as a critical, reflexive branch of knowledge that investigates translational phenomena of any sort and of any provenience to study the way(s) translations function in their environment of reception. The interaction between source text and target text, the bidirectionality of intercultural exchange and the reciprocal nature of communication is a crucial definitional feature of translation that should be incorporated in any theoretical concept and taken into account in any attempt to study, theorize and explain translation relationships. Translation research should, therefore, emphasize the relevance of translation to the source text, the source language and culture as effective entity and active part in the translation process, taking the idea of reciprocity in its strict sense as point of departure. Translation scholars and researchers need to ask about the different ways source text and target text interact with and influence each other, how translation functions as creative force and shaping power in relation to the source text, its interpretation and/or production, how these processes and interactions are realized in different cultural situations, communication contexts, textual traditions and historical periods, what role cultural agents, including (but not limited to) authors and translators, play in these productive processes and how they (seek to) influence them and are themselves influenced by them, to what extent these processes and interactions



are informed by aspects such as cultural prestige and power distribution, political and ideological agendas, economic and social realities, technological developments, trade and military relations, legal and institutional circumstances, colonialism, imperialism and globalization, or other aspects and considerations of personal and psychological nature and individual motivation.

#### *4. Conclusion*

The descriptive approach developed by Gideon Toury has played a major role in the development of Translation Studies and is still motivating a lot of research in the discipline. It is not an exaggeration to say that Toury's work revolutionized the scientific field. Thanks to his efforts, Translation Studies has acquired an individual profile as an independent discipline with its own research program. It also no longer has the normative tone it used to have previously. Through emphasizing the value of and the need for systematic descriptive studies based on a solid methodology and a genuine interest in translations as they exist, Toury brought forward a dynamic research paradigm that provides researchers with a valuable tool to investigate translational phenomena in their sociocultural context. Thus, DTS was crucial in overcoming ideological imperatives and preconceived hypotheses, turning the focus to translations as historical objects and considerably expanding the limits of translational research to cover new areas. To the extent it enhanced scholarship, Translation Studies as a whole will remain for the foreseeable future indebted to Toury's contributions.

On the other hand, the assumption of scientific neutrality and objectivity pertinent to the descriptive approach is very problematic, as it facilitates a rather illusive belief in the possibility of pure descriptions free from any value judgment or personal involvement on the part of the researcher. This is most evident in the concept of translation as a target-cultural 'fact', which, if carefully considered, proves counterproductive, as it reduces translation to one aspect and discourages research in dynamic areas and into other directions. Indeed, many translation scholars do not adhere anymore to this empiricist formulation. They have acknowledged that translation is always a unique mixture of different, multilayered motivations, as Gentzler (2001: 144) puts it, "a complex set of translational relations in any given situation." Therefore, the assumption of the priority of the prospective function and target-cultural

factors in translation needs to be completely reconsidered. This empiricist view is indeed not only detrimental to the aims and programs of Translation Studies, which are “to develop explanatory hypotheses which account for the effects of translations [...]” (Chesterman & Arrojo, 2000: thesis 22), it is also generally misleading, as it prevents scholars from appreciating and investigating the mutual, reciprocal nature of translational interactions and processes. In this way, Toury seems—in contradiction to his own rationale—to fix once and for all a phenomenon “which is characterized by its very *variability*”, thus determining in turn “what is [allegedly] ‘inherently’ translational” (1995: 31).

The empiricism discussion in Translation Studies has shown that there are no value-free judgments and that, as Arrojo (Chesterman & Arrojo, 2000: 158) says, no research can be completely ‘objective’ or ‘descriptive’, as individual preferences and motivations will inevitably influence the research process. Instead of ignoring this, it would be better for a researcher to acknowledge their personal involvement and try to use this potential in a constructive way, questioning their motivations throughout the process. This does not mean giving up scholarly objectivity. Rather, what is missing is “a recognition that judgments can’t be avoided in this or any other cultural theory. Even at the level of devising and executing a research project, a scholarly interpretation will be laden with the values of its cultural situation” (Venuti, 1999: 28).

The latest developments in Translation Studies make clear the need for alternative concepts and models that take into consideration the complex nature of translation and the interdependencies of the translation situation. This tendency away from unidirectional, one-dimensional to multidimensional and multiperspectival paradigms is very welcome as it takes us a step further in our understanding of translation and the way translated texts function in their historical and cultural environment. Translations and the communicative settings they are embedded in do not correspond to and cannot be properly explained by predefined, positivist concepts and rigid, preconfigured frameworks. Accordingly, I have argued throughout this discussion that translation and translations in any specific situation and regardless of context are not determined by only one set of causal relations. Translation involves both sides and is governed by mutual interests and reciprocal forces that overlap and intersect in diverse, complex ways. In that sense, there is no necessary or natural correspondence between source- and target-orientedness as such and any translation strategy or method. Faithfulness to the source text and its intention(s) might be realized through a literal or free translation. By the same logic, adaptation to the linguistic and cultural norms and values of target-

cultural recipients does not entail target-orientedness as an intrinsic value of translations or translation in general. We can conclude that translation is neither source- nor target-oriented by nature and that these categories, and by necessity any concept or definition deriving from them, do not express a universal truth or essential feature of translation as such and, therefore, cannot be generalized and applied to all individual cases and situations.

### References

- Bassnett, S. & Lefevere, A. (eds.) (1990) *Translation, History and Culture*. London: Pinter Publishers.
- Brownlie, S. (2003) 'Distinguishing some Approaches to Translation Research: The Issue of interpretative Constraints.' *The Translator* 9(1), pp. 39-64.
- Chesterman, A. (1993) 'From 'Is' to 'Ought': Laws, Norms, and Strategies in Translation Studies.' *Target* 5(1), pp. 1-20.
- Chesterman, A. (2000) *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Chesterman, A. & Arrojo, R. (2000) 'Shared Ground in Translation Studies.' *Target* 12, pp. 151-160.
- Dizdar, D. (2000) 'Descriptive Translation Studies (and Beyond): Überlegungen aus und zu Tourys Theorie.' *TextconText* 14(1), pp. 105-129.
- Dizdar, D. (2006) *Translation, Um- und Irrwege*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- Dizdar, D. (2012) 'Dekonstruktive Rahmenbedingungen.' In Barbara, A. (ed.), *Translationswissenschaftliches Kolloquium II: Beiträge zur Übersetzungs- und Dolmetschwissenschaft (Köln/Germersheim)*, Frankfurt am Main: Lang, pp. 137-165.
- Dollerup, C. (1997) 'Translation as Imposition vs. Translation as Requisition.' In Snell-Hornby, M., Jettmarová, Z. & Kaindl, K. (eds.), *Translation as Intercultural Communication: Selected Papers From the EST Congress - Prague 1995*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 45-56.
- Gentzler, E. (2001) *Contemporary Translation Theories*. 2nd rev. edn., Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Gutt, E.-A. (1991) *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Heller, L. (2013) *Translationswissenschaftliche Begriffsbildung und das Problem der performativen Unauffälligkeit von Translation*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.

- Hermans, T. (ed.) (1985) *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*. London: Croom Helm.
- Hermans, T. (1995) 'Toury's Empiricism Version One.' *The Translator* 1(2), pp. 215-223.
- Hermans, T. (1999) *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and System-oriented Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Holmes, J. S. (2004[1972]) 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies.' In Venuti, Lawrence (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*. New York & London: Routledge, pp. 180-192.
- Holz-Mänttari, J. (1984) *Translatorisches Handeln: Theorie und Methode*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.
- Ivir, V. (2004) 'Descriptive and Prescriptive Approaches in the Linguistic Study of Translation.' In Kittel, H. (ed.) *Übersetzung: Ein internationales Handbuch zur Übersetzungsforschung = Translation*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 276-277.
- Koller, W. (1990) 'Zum Gegenstand der Übersetzungswissenschaft.' In Arntz, R. & Thome, G. (eds.) *Übersetzungswissenschaft. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven. Festschrift für Wolfram Wilss zum 65 Geburtstag*, pp. 19-30.
- Koller, W. (2011) *Einführung in die Übersetzungswissenschaft*. 8th rev. edn., Tübingen & Basel: A. Francke Verlag.
- Lefevere, A. (1992) *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London: Routledge.
- Möller-Christensen, I. (1996) 'Hans Christian Andersens Durchbruch in Deutschland: ein wahres Märchen.' In Detering, H. (ed.) *Grenzgänge: Skandinavisch-deutsche Nachbarschaften*. Göttingen: Wallstein, pp. 132-146.
- Newmark, P. (1981) *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Niranjana, T. (1992) *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- Pym, A. (1996) 'Venuti's Visibility.' *Target* 8(1), pp. 165-177.
- Pym, A. (1998) *Method in Translation History*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Pym, A. (2002) 'Intercultures and the Interface with Nationalist Culture.' Self-publication, 10 pp, n.p., [Online] [Accessed on 4th July 2014] <http://www.tinet.cat/~apym/on-line/intercultures.html>
- Pym, A. (2010) *Exploring Translation Theories*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Reiß, K. & Vermeer, H. J. (1991) *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*. 2nd edn., Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Robinson, D. (1991) *The translator's Turn*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Sandrini, P. (2004) 'Globalisierung und Mehrsprachigkeit: Translation im Wandel?' In Zybatow, L. N. (ed.) *Translation in der Globalen Welt und neue Wege in der Sprach- und Übersetzerausbildung*. Frankfurt (M): Peter Lang, pp. 165-177.
- Steiner, G. (1975) *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Toury, G. (1980) *In Search of a Theory of Translation*. Tel Aviv: Porter Inst. for Poetics and Semiotics.
- Toury, G. (1985) 'A Rationale for Descriptive Translation Studies.' In Hermans, T. (ed.) *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, London: Croom Helm, pp. 16-41.
- Toury, G. (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Tymoczko, M. (2010) *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Venuti, L. (1999) *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. London: Routledge.
- Vermeer, H. J. (1978) 'Ein Rahmen für eine Allgemeine Translationstheorie.' *Zeitschrift für interlinguale und interkulturelle Kommunikation* 3, pp. 99-102.
- Vermeer, H. J. (1996) *A Skopos Theory of Translation: Some Arguments For and Against*. Heidelberg: TEXTconTEXT.
- Wilss, W. (1982) *The Science of Translation: Problems and Methods*. trans. & rev. by author. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.