Translation Studies and Interpretation: States of the Art

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Christina Schaeffner studied English and Russian at Leipzig University, Germany. After completion of her PhD, she worked briefly at Leipzig University, teaching English language, translation and interpreting. From 1982 till 1992, she was the head of a research team at the Saxon Academy of Arts and Sciences at Leipzig, which conducted research in the fields of political vocabulary, text linguistics and translation studies. From 1992 till 2015, she was at Aston University in Birmingham, UK, where she taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in translation studies, interpreting, text analysis and supervised PhD students in these areas. In September 2015, she retired from her post as Professor of Translation Studies, but continues to be research active, e.g. through conference presentations, refereeing, giving guest lectures, and as a member of editorial boards of multiple journals. Her main research interests are political discourse and translation, metaphor in translation, and translation didactics. For several years, she has been a member of the international CETRA staff and was CETRA chair professor in 2011. She was responsible for one of the four sub-projects of the Marie Curie initial training network TIME (Translation Research Training: an integrated and intersectoral model for Europe) , which ran from 2011 till 2014 and was established with support from the European Commission.

From 2007-2009, she was a member of the EMT expert group, set up by the Directorate General for Translation (DGT) of the European Commission whose main task was to make specific proposals with a view to implementing a European Master's in Translation (EMT) throughout the European Union. She was also a member of the steering committee of OPTIMALE, an Erasmus academic network Optimising Professional Translator Training in a Multilingual Europe.

Dr. Soleimani:

Professor Christina Schaeffner, I am deeply grateful for your accepting the interview on major issues on translation studies. First of all, we would be pleased to hear your brief autobiography, for the readers of ALRJournal to know you more and be familiar with your academic career, works, and opinions.

Professor Schaeffner

I studied English and Russian at Leipzig Univeristy, Germany. After completion of my PhD, I worked briefly at Leipzig University, teaching English language, translation and interpreting. From 1982 till 1992, I was the head of a research team at the Saxon Academy of Arts and Sciences at Leipzig, which conducted research in the fields of political vocabulary, text linguistics and translation studies. In1992, I moved to the United Kingdom to take up an academic position at Aston University. Until my retirement in September 2015 I was the Director of Translation Studies and taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in translation studies, interpreting, text analysis and research methods. I also supervised PhD students in these areas. For several years, I have been a member of the international CETRA staff (annual summer school for PhD students in translation studies), and was CETRA chair professor in 2011. I was responsible for one of the four sub-projects of the Marie Curie initial training network TIME (Translation Research Training: an integrated and intersectoral model for Europe). This network operated from 2011 till 2014 and was established with support from the European Commission. I was the chair of the organising committee of the 6th International Critical Link conference, held at Aston University from 26-30 July 2010.

During my work at Aston University, I was the Aston representative on the National Network for Translation, and a member of the steering committee of OPTIMALE, an Erasmus academic network Optimising Professional Translator Training in a Multilingual Europe. From 2007-2009, I was a member of the EMT expert group set up by the Directorate General for Translation (DGT) of the European Commission whose main task was to make specific proposals with a view to implementing a European Master's in Translation (EMT) throughout the European Union.

Dr. Soleimani

Thank you for the comprehensive introduction. Now let's start with a basic question usually posed in academic settings, the terms "Translation" and "Interpretation". How do you differentiate the concepts? Are the constructs different theoretically?

Professor Schaeffner

A simple answer would be: translation involves transfer of written material, and interpreting the transfer of oral speech. In the discipline of Translation and Interpreting Studies, we prefer to speak of interpreting, since interpretation can be ambiguous (it can be a synonym to analysis, comprehension). A more academic differention was initially provided by Otto Kade in the late 1960s. He sees the existence of the source text for the translator/interpreter at the time of translating/interpreting as the main differentiating criterion. For translation, the source text is somehow materially fixed (e.g. written on paper, recorded on a tape), and available to the translator

until the target text has been produced. This allows the translator to repeatedly check the emerging target text against the source text, consult resources (such as dictionaries, internet, glossaries, experts), and make corrections and revisions as needed. For interpreting, the source text is presented only once, it is not available to the interpreter in a materially fixed form (although it may be such for the speaker). The input for the interpreter's work is thus a mentally stored version of the input, stored in the short-term memory. This means that the interpreter cannot consult resources (or only in an extremely limited way) and cannot correct and/or revise the output (or again, only in an extremely limited way, such as immediately correcting slips of the tongue if the interpreter is aware of them). For translation, the producer of the source text and the receivers of the target text are separated in terms of space and time, whereas for interpreting, they will be together, at least in terms of time (e.g. in remote or telephone interpreting, text producer and receiver can be in different places). Interpreting is sub-divided according to the mode into simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, with liason interpreting often listed as a third type.

Dr. Soleimani

In linguistics, a disctinction is commonly made between competence and performance, of course in the Chomskyan paradigm. It seems you believe in "translation competence" as postulated in *Developing Translation Competence* (Schaeffner & Adab, 2000). What is your theoretical definition and the nature of this particular competence? How could it be developed in practice for instructional purposes?

Professor Schaeffner

Indeed, when I speak of translation competence, I do not at all link it to Chomsky. There are a number of definitions and models of translation competence, which are most often very similar to each other. Most models break down translation competence (or: translator competence) into a number of sub-competences. I prefer to use the model which was developed for the European Master's in Translation (EMT) project (I was a member of the expert group which developed this model). This is actually a development from the way we defined translation competence in the 2000 book you mentioned above. The EMT translator competence profile is designed as a reference framework for learning outcomes. It specifies what is to be achieved, acquired and mastered at the end of a postgraduate training programme. Competence here is understood as the 'combination of aptitudes, knowledge, behaviour and knowhow necessary to carry out a given task under given conditions' (EMT Expert Group 2009: 3). The EMT profile details the competences which professional translators, as experts in multilingual and multimedia communication, need in order to work in the rapidly evolving language industry. The six competence areas, which are closely interrelated are: Translation Service Provision Competence (with an Interpersonal and a Production dimension), Language Competence, Intercultural Competence (with a Sociolinguistic and a Textual dimension), Information Mining Competence, Thematic Competence, and Technology Competence. Each of these six areas is specified further into more detailed aspects of declarative and procedural knowledge (see https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/emt_competences_translators_en.pdf), and I would recommend to everybody involved in translator training to have a look at this document. For training and teaching purposes, this EMT framework provides an excellent input in that as teachers we can reflect on how all the detailed aspects listed for each of the six competence areas can be incorporated into a training programme. I have published a few articles on how I have used this model for my own teaching at Master's level.

Dr. Soleimani

One of the issues currently discussed in scientific circles when referring to knowledge and its development is " Constructivism". It's a hot issue in philosophy in general and applied linguistics in particular. How can constructivism be applied in translation studies?

Professor Schaeffner

As said above, I feel that the EMT model is very well suited for a constructivist approach to translator training. This involves above all a student-centered approach to translator training, competence-oriented teaching methods, professionally-oriented learning models. When we want/need to prepare our students for working in real-life settings, our training should be as realistic as possible. This includes using authentic assignments, and also incorporates task-based learning, collaborative learning, team-work. I can strongly recommend the work by Donald Kiraly (e.g. his book *A Social-Constructivist Approach to Translator Education*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 2000), which offers both the theorectical framework of a constructivist approach and plenty of food for thought for using it in the classroom.

Dr. Soleimani

How about "multiple reality" in epistemology as implied by scholars? Do you think of multiple reality playing any role in translation process?

Professor Schaeffner

I'm not familiar with this concept. But I think that any form of training which is geared towards the real market and using authentic assignments is a kind of reflecting about multiple realities. Translation is not a simple replacement of linguistic units in language A by equivalent units in language B (the old, traditional view of translating as transcoding). Meaning is not fixed in the text, but meaning is created, constituted, constructed, by users in specific contexts and in line with their communicative aims and their own background knowledge, attitudes, expectations, and also depending on ergonomic factors (e.g. attention, physical environment, emotions). For example, in a classroom context, we can use one source text and ask students to translate this one and the same text for different purposes (*skopoi*). Different purposes will lead to different target texts. Such an exercise will make clear to the students that there are different realities, with each texts fitting its own intended reality.

Dr. Soleimani

Ok. Thank you for the lucid description on multiple reality and translation. Then could you please tell us whether you believe in "indeterminacy in translation" as advocated by some authors and scholars or not?

Professor Schaeffner

I'm not sure my answer was indeed lucid since, as I said above, I'm not really familiar with the concept of 'multiple realities'. With 'indeterminacy in translation', I assume you are referring to Quine. My own research has

always been empirical work, that is, I have worked with actual data (texts, translations, translators). As said above, translation is not an exercise in simply replacing smaller units (such as words or phrases). Translation always involves texts in contexts and in cultures, which fulfil specific functions for their users. And also as said aove, meaning is not in the text but it is constructed in the process of engaging with a text. In other words, meanings are not fixed, not determined. There is never the one and only correct translation of a source text or an item in a source text. When we understand and investigate translation as a social practice, we also need to be aware that such an investigation involves, for example, asking for (real or potential) reasons for a translator's decision, asking what other agents were involved before the final target text got published (e.g. revisors), looking at the contexts and circumstances in which the translator worked (e.g., was there time pressure, did electronic translation tools have an impact on the work?). The more recent sociological models in translation with their focus on agency and context are much more promising for investigating translation as a social practice than philosophical or hermeneutic reflections which are often not based on authentic texts and translations.

Dr. Soleimani

I personally had the chance of reading the chapter you authored "Translation and Politics" in *A Companion to Translation* published by Multilingual Matters in 2007. I confess the chapter was highly motiviating and impressive for me specially when you focused you "the politics of translation" and "the politicization of translation". I suppose it might be informative for readers to see your explanation of the topics.

Professor Schaeffner

Well, I'm afraid it would be going too far to provide a summary of this chapter. I would hope that more of your colleagues and students will read it. In this paper, I actually covered three aspects: the politics of translation, the translation of political texts, and the politicisation of translation (studies). The translation of political texts is easy to understand. Basically, what I mean by the politics of translation is the investigation of questions such as: Who decides which texts get translated, and from and into which languages? Where are the translations produced? Which factors determine the translator's behaviour? How are translations received? What is the status of translations, of translating, and of translators in the respective cultures and systems? Who chooses and trains translators, how many, for which language combinations? All these questions are related to politics, i.e. a decision to encourage, allow, promote, hinder, or prevent to translate is a political decision. Translators perform their work in socio-political contexts and environments. Studying these contexts in addition to the actual products (i.e. source texts and target texts) allows for deeper insights into translation than focusing solely on the (linguistics features of the) products.

With the politicisation of translation (studies) I refer to the fact that texts (i.e. translations) are put to use for political purposes. It can be that, for example in the context of multilingual text production (e.g. in the United Nations, the European Union institutions) the different language versions may give rise to different political interpretations or activities. There is quite a lot of work which has been conducted under the heading 'Translation and power' (e.g. the book *Translation and Power* edited by Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), and recent work on translation/translators and activism is also interesting in this respect, and also raises questions of professional ethics.

Dr. Soleimani

As closely related to the previous discussion on politics and translation, then what do you mean by "political discourse analysis" (PDA) and how is it different from critical discourse analysis (CDA) as defined in the literature? Is a marriage between PDA and translation studies feasible you think?

Professor Schaeffner

Political discourse analysis is basically a critical discourse analysis of political texts. In the work I did together with my colleague Paul Chilton, we used methods as developed in CDA for analyzing political texts. Methods from CDA have fruitfully been applied in translation studies, but I would still think that CDA/PDA are independent and can be used also for analyzing texts which have nothing to do with translation. Similarly, depending on their research question(s), translation studies scholars can also use other methods than those from CDA (e.g. for process studies, for analyzing contexts and agents).

Dr. Soleimani

I know, from reading your rich resume, you have been the supervisor of numerous PhD dissertations and MA theses on translation studies. You are the author of many books, book chapters, and articles in journals. What are your suggestions for translation students regarding translation research and gaps in the current areas of translation studies in the present time?

Professor Schaeffner

We need more research, and more doctoral students, sure. My advice would be to encourage an interest in research amongst our BA and MA students. For example, it is often that students working on their MA dissertation develop an interest in research and see that the topic for their Master's dissertation can be expanded to lead to a PhD. I'm strictly against supervisors to come up with a list of topics from which students are expected to choose.I very much prefer students to come with their own proposals for a research topic. There is so much we don't know yet and which can be researched. In the United Kingdom, universities expect applicants for a PhD to come with a clear idea on what they want to research, why this topic is relevena and worth of investigation. We also expect them to already know a lot of relevant previous research conducted so far, have done some preliminary analysis to be able to decide on their research questions, their corpus, and their methodology. In the UK, PhD students normally have 3 years for their research, which requires that quite a lot of work has been done in advance, i.e. before the actual start of the PhD. As a supervisor, I want to learn something new myself. If I already know the anwers to the research questions, there wouldn't be any need to do the research in the first place. In order to identify gaps in our knowledge and trends in current research, it would be useful to follow Translation Studies journals and conferences. They are good indicators of what is going on and what has been identified as being in need of research.

Dr. Soleimani

What about the area of "machine translation"? is MT a promising field of study? How about its future? If we take its feasibility into account, are you personally for or against MT, particulary regarding your own interest in PDA, TS, and CDA?

Professor Schaeffner

Machine translation has made huge progress. With the new systems, such as MT based on actual translations or neural MT, the quality of translation has improved. So in a word, MT is definitely a promising field of study. I wouldn't say I'm for or against MT. The actual value of using MT in the translation industry probably depends on the genre and the purpose of translation. For some purposes (e.g. just understanding the topic of the text), MT is very useful, but I doubt there are actually attempts of using MT for poetry translation. MT is here to stay, and as TS scholars we should cooperate with IT experts to improve it further. From a research perspective, I can image plenty of research questions we may be interested in. As far as my own research is concerned, MT will not be on my list of topics, mainly because I'm not too familiar with it. But I do hope there will be a lot of research on MT conducted in future.

Dr. Soleimani

To take the practical issues of translation into account, what are your suggestions to translation teachers and practitioners? What should translation students consider to be "professional" in translation?

Professor Schaeffner

When I talked about translation competence above and the EMT profile, I already touched upon these issues. Translation is a profession in its own right, translators are experts in producing texts which are appropriate for their specified purpose. They also know how to interact with clients, other experts, and their peers. They know how to produce their target texts and are able to jutify their translation solutions. They can communicate about their work to society at large, and they are aware of and can talk about the social relevance of translation. As teachers and trainers, we need to be aware that translation is a social practice and cover as many and varied aspects of the translation profession as possible in our classes. Unfortunately, it is still often the case that teachers of translation are experts in languages, but not in translation, and that they still look at translation as a process of transferring meaning, as reproducing the source text as closely as possible, and marking translations by looking for errors, e.g. deducting points if a word has not been translated by the closest equivalent word in the target language. The EMT project has also suggested competence for the translator trainer, a very relevant document. A main criterion is that the trainer should be able to perform any task assigned to the students according to the quality standards required in professional practice, in particular, language proficiency and intercultural competences. I can imagine that this is quite a challenge for some university programmes.

Dr. Soleimani

Dear Professor, thank you so much for your accepting to to share you knowledge wit hour audience. Surely your explanations and views are great assests for those interested in translation studies and would shed light on major issues currently discussed in scientific circles.