

## LAMBERT'S NOTICE ON LEAL'S CETRA DISCUSSION



JOSÉ LAMBERT

**The following is José Lambert's notice on Alice Leal's CETRA discussion as presented in her text published in this issue of *Scientia Traductionis*.**

**T**he two notes by Alice Leal on CETRA are extremely different. The first one, in the EST Newsletter (2009, 2) is really a promotional document, written in good spirit and with a nice touch of humour. It would be difficult to produce more stimulating notes on our Summer Session. The second one, published in this issue of *Scientia Traductionis* is also generally speaking, very strongly and explicitly recommending CETRA, in many pages and in several long paragraphs, with lots of practical indications that will certainly benefit to the future participants; the second part of this "report" delivers a systematic analysis of the many sections in CETRA 2009 (the lectures by the CETRA Professor, the many seminars by the staff, the tutorials, the presentations by the students, etc. etc.) And this is just the beginning, since in every subsection of the program the summary of the "paper" is followed by explicit comments and questions. What an effort, what a performance! All this with style! It is upon invitation that I reply to the second one – and such a discussion makes sense because of the approach in the "Report" (as it is called), which is really discussion-oriented (or question-oriented) and deliberately individual. Should I say "idiosyncratic"?

While the description of the organizational components is again full of enthusiasm, the discussion is proposed in intellectual and rational terms, with lots of quotations and with lots of questions also by our "reporter". Why not? The strange thing is that, from the beginning to the very end, our student-reporter feels submitted to hesitations, to heavy questions, which lead into both emotions and "a lot of confusion", as made clear on the basis of the first individual contacts between the "student Leal" and the staff about her research topic.

Hence the *confusion* idea becomes the leitmotiv throughout the entire discussion, and this is why this globally impressive document will probably be remembered as a really critical "*Auseinandersetzung*" between CETRA and one of its participants.

It is due to its starting point, Alice Leal's article, that my own answer will be focusing on several converging points. The difficulty is really not the matter of "evaluation" as such; there is not even any reason for worrying from this point of view: the two CETRA weeks are presented time and again as an exceptional experience, and Alice Leal never hurts any personal feelings, not even any individual partner nor staff member. The difficulty is entirely

linked with the kind of difficulties taken into consideration and with the various (more or less convergent) questions and positions formulated. Not the issues selected as such have surprised me; it is not for the first time that I take part in the (critical) scrutiny of activities and work of this kind. Should I mention again that between 1975 and 2010 most of the topics popping up at CETRA have been my daily life – and that critical, often even ironical or aggressive arguments have been part of that life: not only at my own university (first of all), but on a few continents, in courses, seminars, congresses and in a few scholarly journals. A few items/arguments (besides some obvious mistakes – in most cases innocent) don't need to be taken very tragically – a short "*Auseinandersetzung*" might eliminate the misunderstanding (well, that's the word I use; I guess there are misunderstandings). The main reasons for my own confusion are, after Alice's:

1°) The analysis ("description") of almost all sessions under observation and under discussion, in particular the very discussions after these sessions in Leal's wording (what my colleagues have said, what has been answered). Let me be very explicit: I mean "the verbal formulation" by Mr. x and Ms. y. *Did we really say so?* This is a complicated issue, for any "speaker", for "reporters", for narrators, interpreters, scholars – in particular after so many months. I hope to be able to indicate that this report is a narration of a special type – and this may help in (mis)understandings. Anyway I try to avoid answering by Yes/No ("*parole contre parole*", as they would say in French).

2°) The use of these quotes and dialogues in view of the confrontation between CETRA and the so-called discipline (Translation Studies) or a particular orientation within this discipline called DTS (I apologize for using DTS: Descriptive Translation Studies, as also in the report); to give already one simple example here, without claiming to know what every participant may have said (or not said), I wonder how in the conclusion of this report the concept of "'true' science" can be used as a key to CETRA, or better: how the impression can be left that such a concept has been used by the CETRA staff, either orally, during the sessions, or in writing, in their publications. The whole discussion indeed concentrates on the scholarly claims of CETRA and "many of its staff members".

Let me identify a few key moments, I mean, the controversial items; they are not limited to specific paragraphs since several among them are recurrent items, like leitmotifs:

- the first contacts and questions with the CETRA staff, which generate the general "confusion" theme;
- the lectures by Martha Cheung, which generate the terminological questions about China (and Brazil?), global/local, about CETRA's (and DTS) (*imaginary?*) reluctance to everything local (not general) – and even about (European, North-American) hegemonies;
- Gideon Toury's position within CETRA discourse (*why do you quote...?/ why don't you rather quote Mr.X or Mrs. Y ?*);
- CETRA's (*structuralist?*) terminology and concepts.

Let me start with something that I tend to see as one of the roots of the "debate" (if I may call it so). The real debate takes off from the moment Leal introduces her own research topics to the CETRA people (beginning of 3.3); something seems to have gone wrong in the initial interaction between staff and student in relation with the PhD research project and/or about the favorite research topics of a participant arriving from another continent. The entire scholarly discussion, as summarized in the report, is linked all the time with this initial experience. I shall interpret this further as a problem in terms of expectations. Alice Leal is disappointed from the moment she notices that the academic staff does not really share her – somewhat promotional – enthusiasm about the topics for research she is dealing with (Brazilian Translation Studies, Deconstructionism, a few individual theoreticians, ...etc.). There can be no doubt however about the expectations of her partners from the academic staff, whose intention is to support and to improve research on many different topics, and who would even feel a bit bad at ease for privileging a given topic rather than another one: in their academic environment, they would even dream about publishing on "How to select a research topic/topics for PhD research?" They have many reasons for not supporting any promotional goals. And this is also what they expect on behalf of most participants: motivation for research rather than the promotion of particular names, cultures, approaches (true, this is a bit more tricky). And then the itinerary of our CETRA student takes off, after what seems to be an initial misunderstanding.

Throughout the various moments of the summer session (lectures, seminars, tutorials, symposium, students' presentations), a few confrontations are summarized in terms of questions and answers, sometimes with more explicit comments. In most situations (not in every situation), questions are asked by Alice Leal, the answers come from the speakers/staff members. Most of the paragraphs (not all of them) finish by either/or positions, i.e. polemical questions. This is why I tend to call this report "a debate". To the extent that it claims to summarize a two-week summer session, the most surprising thing is that, according to this report, so few other people seem to have asked any questions. This does not correspond too well to the image that the CETRA events have got, the more since their goal is to provide mutual feedback, preferably well linked with the students' projects (not only during the tutorials). In the narrative produced by Leal, the CETRA staff answers her questions, not vice versa. In fact all participants are surrounded, overwhelmed by questions, from the beginning to the end – and I have not forgotten myself what kind of questions have been asked about "Brazilian Translation Studies" (*what this concept exactly refers to, how to get documented about it, what are the exact goals of the PhD project, etc.*). There is no doubt about the focus: in its selection of key moments and key topics, Leal's narrative does not really belong to the multi-perspectivist tradition, as narratologists would call it. It favors the more explicit analysis rather than the panoramic survey (and this is in contrast with the technical description of the program: why not?).

It is only little by little that "the Toury problem" (one of the leitmotifs) pops up, in questions such as (I shorten and simplify): "Why is he so often quoted?"<sup>1</sup>; "Why not Hans Vermeer, the

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<sup>1</sup> In the 2010 reading list, there are 2 Toury references out of more or less 40; of course it is not sure that the 40 ones will be mentioned more often: <http://www.kuleuven.be/cetra/bibliography/readinglist.html>.

Skopos Theory or Stanley Fish, after all?" Without answering this apparently limited question, without quarreling about the entire issue (*when, whom do you quote? why do you quote particular scholars and/or their publications?*), let me make clear that almost everything that is related to Toury and/or DTS in Leal's text is – simply – wrong. To start with a very innocent issue: Toury is not to be mentioned among the "founding fathers of CETRA" (I happen to be well informed myself, but this is also easy to check). It is indeed more important to notice how ubiquitous and influential Toury has been and still is in CETRA's approach to translation. It is indeed difficult to disconnect him from the entire venture, and hence Toury's shadow is playing a role in our terminology and concepts, as will be made clear below. The last paragraph of the report sums up central problems on the CETRA agenda and the very last sentences focus on ("structuralist"?) concepts. There is an enormous technical difficulty though: terminological quarrels are not very convincing on the basis of oral evidence only, especially when the accumulation of questions and quotations is, say, most surprising.

Herewith a few samples from the terminological and conceptual confrontation. To tell the truth, I don't recognize neither my colleagues nor CETRA – neither in speaking nor in writing; as far as I know (them), they are not compatible with the intellectual portrait that follows.

According to CETRA, at least according to this report:

- translation theories are supposed to be "global, applicable to the entire world, in and with the same terms", "in the very same way all over the world", which implies that the use of "Chinese" in "Chinese mentality", "Chinese discourse" or "Chinese translation" becomes problematic, which even leads into the – surprising – conclusion that Martha Cheung was criticized – and for these very reasons. "China" and "Chinese", and several other concepts ("Brazilian", "deconstructionist") disturb the CETRA team's world view (this is repeated time and again) to the point that their (cultural? political? conceptual?) openness is somewhat problematic. And there is no doubt about Cheung's position, who "quite rightly replied that power and scholarship go hand in hand, as do nationality, translation, and language, hence her need to speak locally" (section 3.4). The conviction that Cheung and CETRA had an explicit argument on Chinese vs. local approaches to translation was even to be expected ("Quite predictably, Cheung was criticized for not advocating a global translation theory, applicable to the entire world, in and with the same terms.")(3.4).

- Dirk Delabastita (and many of the CETRA teachers) "basically advocated an international or global approach, claiming that Translation Studies must go through an 'international turn' so as to become more scientific"; "local theories inevitably lead into a harmful fragmentation of the discipline, which in turn makes it less scientific"; Yves Gambier is also worried about the homogeneity of the discipline when tackling terminological issues; in the same section (e.g. Christina Schäffner's seminar), where "norms" are also at stake, the idea of "strictly descriptive" perspectives is used three times with suspicion (*strictly descriptive category, the strictly descriptive character of Descriptive Translation Studies, with strictly descriptive eyes*) in one and the same paragraph, next to "universal norms" (!) – and Schäffner would even have added "that

neutrality is a perfectly achievable aim" (and CETRA students, by the way, want to answer very specific, "objective" questions); the idea of "objective" perception, of universal/neutral terms is used all the time in the (short) analysis of seminars by Delabastita, Schäffner, Van Doorslaer (who also worries about the press: "newspapers should be more neutral and offer a more unbiased view of events").

- hence the objection by Alice Leal – against Schäffner – that one cannot accept "to simply disregard the fact that this kind of study inevitably influences the researcher".

- Christiane Nord (and the whole German functional approach) would have been treated as "allegedly solely prescriptive";

- and "prescriptive work is not research", at least this is how Yves Gambier puts it (is supposed to have put it); and the same Gambier seems to agree with Delabastita to the extent that "translating should be approached in the exact same way all over the world";

- in view of avoiding "universalistic approaches" (the term is not used by A.L., but it is well-known in DTS), Rosemary Arrojo's and Cristina Rodrigues' work from the 1990's may offer a solution (section 3.5).

Most among these confrontations are formulated in either/or terms, as more or less polemical categories. Most of the answers provided by the staff (in this report) are clear-cut; they also happen to be quoted along discursive principles that are known among us as *taboo*, in *taboo words* (translation theories *have to be* global"; "we *should...*", "Translation Studies *should* avoid..."). It is correct indeed that the people portrayed in this context tend to avoid being prescriptive (normative) in their scholarly work. The answers provided by the staff, their terminology (which appears to be strangely universalistic and positivistic: in the last paragraphs it is suggested that they have something to do with "'true' Science") and the comments provided by Alice Leal represent a strange scholarly profile, almost a parody of the conceptual world of the people mentioned, if not of the CETRA group in general, to the extent that most of the topics under discussion have been under discussion in their work, and not only in *their* work, since the 1970's. The idea that translation scholars (and scholars in general) used to be influenced by their research topic (as suggested by Leal) is another leitmotiv, in all DTS literature (norms of scholars vs. norms on the level of the object, norms of communities, institutional norms, etc. etc.), since the very first articles by Toury.

In a first movement, I have tried to follow our "reporter", without interfering too much (I would call this a descriptive moment, if the word "descriptive" had not been used in a way so different from the scholarly DTS literature). I have avoided until a given moment to take the floor or to mix up with the many voices combined in the report. The question obviously is whose voices are actually at work. It is not too difficult to use a few simple techniques in order to know at least part – and only part – of the answer.

We can check along three principles:

1° Do these discussions and quotations really belong to the historical CETRA 2009 session, or rather (and mainly) to the report?

2° Have they been verbalized along these lines (more or less literally)?

3° Are they in harmony with the scholarly profile of the people quoted?

As far as the first question goes, I reduce it to the lectures by Martha Cheung, which I have been chairing almost from the beginning to the end. Having chaired almost the entire series of lectures, I am puzzled by the observations that 1° Cheung has been submitted to any systematic criticism, the more since 2° this was narrowly linked with the reluctance – among the audience – to deal with Chinese culture, mentality, translation, except in general, global terms – which would have implied that a conflict about globalization has actually taken place at Leuven, during the 2009 summer session. In case I would remember that this has actually taken place, I would feel excited. Just because I know a few publications in which our colleagues worry about the blindness of our "discipline" in relation with internationalization and globalization<sup>2</sup>. The fact is that in case the discussion summarized in Leal's report had actually taken place, it would have been an opportunity for exploring an abandoned area of the discipline. And I don't feel seduced at all by either the global or the local wor(l)ds used – in this case – as a key to "Chinese translation theories". The trouble is that the Chairman of these sessions does not remember anything about this ("quite predictable"?) clash between so-called globalists and Martha Cheung, nor about her reply from a rather militant Chinese (and "local") perspective. Maybe such polemical moments were expected by some people, maybe they have taken place somewhere else, maybe I have been a victim of amnesia?

The second question is tricky because of the "documents" referred to, i.e. mainly oral communication: *verba volant*. True, besides the bibliographical references, which are not mentioned *hic et nunc*, some written documents (hand outs) have been used during the seminars, and they might help us. Whoever is somewhat familiar with 20 years of CETRA tends to feel in a strange environment: "*Do we/Did we really say so?*"

There is a more reliable solution, however. Why not making use of the "literature" produced around these topics, first of all by the scholars involved, the more since they actually refer to their own scholarly framework from the beginning to the end of their seminars. Given "the importance of terminology and concepts" (see the last paragraphs of the report), it is even embarrassing not to quote from the scholarly literature (except in a few cases, and never referring to the people involved).

The funny thing is that many conflicts and the solutions suggested in the report are nothing else than *open doors* in the literature used and quoted by the CETRA teaching staff (the best example is the quarrel about global/local/general/universal, with which not any CETRA staff member would ever identify): from the moment any scholar wants to account for given phenomena, he/she has to wonder about "how limited/specific" and "how

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<sup>2</sup> José Lambert: «Translation and Globalization.» Armin Frank, Norbert Greiner, Theo Hermans, Harald Kittel, Werner Koller, José Lambert, Fritz Paul, Hrsg. Übersetzung - Translation - Traduction. Ein Internationales Handbuch zur Übersetzungsforschung. An International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies. Encyclopédie internationale de la recherche sur la traduction. Berlin & New York: de Gruyter (Handbücher zur Sprach und Kommunikationswissenschaft), Bd. II, 2007: 1680-1700.

recurrent/general" they are<sup>3</sup>; and while no DTS background is needed at all for adopting such methodological principles, it is true that they are made very central in the didactic approaches – which also explains why they are incompatible with the (often repeated) requirement of general (instead of local) categories. On the other hand several key concepts (descriptive, first of all) appear to be the basis for a distinction line between the two positions (I don't see more than two ones in this either/or debate). The difficulty is that they are quoted and used in combination with other concepts that are known for being incompatible with the previous ones: where could one find "objective", "neutral", "strictly descriptive..." in the scholarly literature produced by exactly the same people? It seems that they are portrayed with "a double tongue"? How then it remains possible to warn – especially in the conclusion – against the terminology used (in all/some seminars?) as structuralist and positivistic (neutral, objective, true Science?) is more than a mystery to me. The trouble is that not translation or Translation Studies only is at stake. Being familiar with the literature might also benefit in relation with another hot topic, i.e. Brazilian, Chinese and other matters, including global/local. No need to mention the enormous scholarly bibliography on such intercultural issues, which has been heavily "enriched" (or corrupted?) in the recent globalization debates: how could we tackle such distinctions, during a research training program, without referring to any scholarly models? Could we rely on the vocabulary of journalists, of the man in the street? It has been written elsewhere that universities, the Humanities, etc. are compromised by their unawareness of our contemporary globalization processes, whether we like them or not. It would be particularly embarrassing if a specialization field like Translation Studies, which has so much to do with communication, would not feel the need to look for an explicit research-based conceptualization – not for the sake of homogeneity, but for the sake of research. And as will be discussed elsewhere, for the sake of university.

It seems that Alice Leal arrived at CETRA full of expectations, and that she left it full of emotions and with, at least, a motivation for further work that was, fortunately, left intact. The initial intentions, the overall expectations underlying this CETRA experience of a talented Brazilian researcher also become visible in another particular disappointment, this time about names to be quoted: Why is Toury quoted all the time? Why don't you mention (more often) Hans Vermeer or...Stanley Fish or...? Indeed, why not? It may have become clear that our discourse is inevitably linked with positions, goals, options, which become indeed visible from the scholarly perspective, even when no bibliographical references are given at all. In the 20 years of CETRA activities, a few hundreds of projects have been under observation, they have always needed the support of scholarly references, – and their diversity hardly requires any comment. The diversity of the scholarly reference frameworks is not even too much linked with the cultural diversity of the topics (going from Bible stories to medieval philosophers and the Internet, from legislation to grammar and subtitling). Not only within our program, but within any university a limited number of references are supposed to be of

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<sup>3</sup> The opening lines of Toury's 1980 book, a quote from Holmes, leave no doubt about the dissatisfaction with actual (would-be) general theories/approaches: "Most of the theories [of translation] that have been produced to date are in reality little more than a prolegomena to [...] a general translation theory, [...] though they [...] may bear the designation of 'general' translation theories..." ( G. Toury 1980. *In Search of a Theory of Translation*. Tel Aviv: The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University. 1980: Foreword, p.7). And this is exactly why norms and research (rather than – general – theories) are needed.

more general interest while a large percentage among them is, no doubt, topic-linked. I don't exclude that Stanley Fish might provide interesting insights, but this depends for what kind of academic research; as a priority in Translation Studies, it would probably be challenging, it may even deserve to become a topic for research. So far CETRA does not have the feeling to select its bibliography for fetishist reasons (the various subareas rather multiply the selection rules), nor to go for the opposite, which I would call the Supermarket principle (where one has to show that everything is within range and available). And I see many research types where Hans Vermeer or Christiane Nord or Juliane House are absolutely indispensable: no need to demonstrate that exclusions are not part of our programs. A given kind of priorities, however, is hard to avoid, and it is directly linked with recent developments in "the discipline": its fragmentation is part of its dynamics, and Delabastita (see our "terminological squabbles") would easily accept the thesis that it is one of the conditions of interdisciplinarity. One of the (many) simple reasons why Toury's work is so prominent in CETRA is that it has been more explicitly concentrating than any other researcher's on the planning of translation studies as a full-fledged area for academic research; he was not at all the only one, he was neither first nor last, but this is the general focus underlying his publications, his research supervision, his thematic discussion of the conceptualization, the basis for *Target* as well as his website. Of course we are also in need for many general/specific publications. And it is clear that many new developments oblige us to go far beyond his work (e.g. his basic concepts are older than the Internet, which has several consequences). The conclusion is that bibliographical references better be functional – and it is often stimulating to demonstrate that alternative channels into research may improve our efficiency (our reader may remember what Chesterman said about this? and about Darwin?).

In her enthusiasm and in her fascination with her own work, Alice Leal seems to have been dreaming of playing the role of an Ambassador. It is stimulating to dream of reinventing CETRA, but it is certainly wise also to know the premises, including in scholarly terms.

*José Lambert*  
*Jose.Lambert@arts.kuleuven.be*