Toward a so-called narrow redefinition of translation in Translation Studies

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Abstract: With this paper, I aim to show that the central concept of Translation Studies (TS), i.e., "translation", should be (re)defined "narrowly" as "the process or result of transferring a text interlinguistically". First, I examine three noteworthy conceptualizations of translation found in TS literature (i.e., Jakobson's, Toury's, and Meylaerts & Marais's). Second, I problematize the notion of "intrasemiotic translation" together with other relevant concepts and thereby highlight terminological as well as conceptual issues surrounding the idea of "translation" in TS. Third, invoking various arguments, I build a case for a so-called narrow and a priori definition of "translation". Fourth, I give an example of such a definition and further develop my position. Fifth, broadening the scope of the study, I propose that we should keep looking for an overarching concept and discipline that would encompass "translation" as well as other similar objects and phenomena. Last, before wrapping up with concluding remarks, I indicate possible avenues to explore in future studies.

Keywords: adaptation studies; conceptual stretching; definitions of translation; multimodality; semiotics.

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that the central concept of Translation Studies (hereafter TS) is *translation*. As such, its definition has been the object of much debate, and a lot of ink has been spilled on the ontological question, namely what is (or is not) *translation*. One of the main points of contention is, simply put, whether translation goes beyond the interlinguistic[1]. Now, as Christian Olalla-Soler, Javier Franco Aixelá, & Sara Rovira-Esteva put it in a recent chapter:

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[1] In this paper, the suffixes *-linguistic* and *-lingual* are used interchangeably (e.g., *interlinguistic* and *interlingual*).

> For better or for worse, modern TS embraces almost anything that can be re-conveyed as a message, from previously ignored technical texts to accessibility issues such as the oral description of images for the blind that have no source text and that no one would have considered as pertaining to the domain of translation studies in the 1960s (Olalla-Soler *et al.*, 2022, p. 36).

In such a context, I will argue that the concept of *translation* should be limited to its "narrow" meaning, i.e., the process or result of transferring a text interlinguistically. I do not aim to cover all that has been written on the topic or to settle the matter once and for all (e.g., I will not weigh in on whether *interpreting* should be included in *translation*). Rather, I wish to develop a rationale for what seems a dissonant point of view, especially in the more or less recent discourse of the discipline. Indeed, the trend in TS is arguably to work toward the expansion of the discipline, chiefly by grounding the argument in the enlargement of the underlying concept of *translation* (e.g., Tymoczko, 2014).

Needless to say, to tackle such a thorny issue is to open a Pandora's box. For this reason, my objective here is humble: to stoke the ongoing debate and to suggest avenues for reflection, both presented from my perspective, which, arguably, goes against the current dominant stream in TS. In this regard, it should be noted that my point of view is not that of a linguist, a (bio)semiotician, a cognitive scientist, a cultural anthropologist or ethnologist, a literary, communication or adaptation scholar, a philosopher, a terminologist, a historian, or a sociologist, but rather that of a translator and a TS scholar. Simply put, I do not see fit to make translation and its scholarly study subservient to any specific discipline and, consequently, I deem there is no absolute necessity to consider the issue from any specific viewpoint external to TS.

First, I will examine three noteworthy conceptualizations of translation found in TS literature (i.e., Jakobson's, 1959; Toury's, 2012; and Meylaerts & Marais's, 2023a). Second, I will problematize the notion of *intrasemiotic translation* together with other relevant concepts and thereby highlight terminological as well as conceptual issues surrounding the idea of *translation* in TS. Third, invoking various arguments, I will build a case for a so-called narrow and a priori definition of translation. Fourth, I will give an example of such a definition and further develop my position. Fifth, broadening the scope of the study, I will propose that we should keep looking for an overarching concept and discipline that would encompass *translation* as well as other similar objects and phenomena. Last, before wrapping up with concluding remarks, I will indicate possible avenues to explore in future studies.

2. The concept of *translation* in TS: a brief critical overview

It is important to mention that this article is not "against" any specific approach, but rather "for" a particular one. Accordingly, the overall focus of the paper is more prospective than retrospective. Among other things, this means that the aim of this section is not to offer a comprehensive account of the concept of *translation* in TS, but rather to assess a few notable examples of the ways translation has been theorized throughout the history of the discipline.

2.1 Jakobson's three types of translation

When introducing influential definitions of *translation*, it only makes sense to start with what is undoubtedly the most famous one, namely that of Roman Jakobson (1959). According to him, translation can be (1) *intralingual* ("rewording"), (2) *interlingual* ("translation proper"), or (3) *intersemiotic* ("transmutation") (Jakobson, 1959, p. 233). By characterizing translation in such an open way, Jakobson broke from the traditionally "narrow" definitions of the concept. The fact that he did so early might explain why his definition has certainly become the most often cited one when it comes to presenting *translation* as a "broad" concept in TS.

In any case, as Brian Mossop (2019, p. 90) points out, "an odd feature of writings in our field is the very frequent and mostly uncritical citation of a snippet from that old Jakobson article distinguishing three 'kinds of translation'". Following Mossop, I believe that there are important issues not so much with Jakobson's text in itself as with the readings of many TS scholars. Therefore, I could not agree more with Mossop's (2019, p. 92) call "to stop casually citing Jakobson's list of three kinds of translating".

A lot has been written about Jakobson's (1959) text, but, in my view, the most critical problem with his definition is that it yields an incomplete "square". Indeed, while there are two "inter-" types of translation (i.e., *interlingual* and *intersemiotic*) and two "-lingual" types (i.e., *interlingual* and *intralingual*), there is only one "intra-" and one "-semiotic" type, so what happens to the possibility of *intrasemiotic translation*? Without going into too much detail, some examples of this would be remaking a film or rearranging a song. If we straightforwardly acknowledge both intersemiotic translation and intralinguistic translation, then there is no rational reason why we should also not accept intrasemiotic translation. Yet, the fact of the matter is that such transformations are only seldom mentioned in TS literature. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated later, the taxonomy resulting from Jakobson's (1959) tripartite definition seems illogical since *interlinguistic translation* should be under either of the *intrasemiotic* or *intersemiotic* categories, not on the same level. Indeed, natural languages either together form a single semiotic system or each possesses its own semiotic system, but, at any rate, a linguistic system is a type (or category) of semiotic system.

2.2 Toury's *assumed translation*

Since Jakobson's (1959) key text, many other definitions of *translation* have been put forward. In his seminal book *Descriptive Translation Studies—and Beyond* first published in 1995, Gideon Toury (2012, p. 28) proposes the notion of *assumed translation* and introduces three postulates to circumscribe it, namely (1) the "Source-Text Postulate", (2) the "Transfer Postulate", and (3) the "Relationship Postulate". He then goes on to sum up his concept in the following way:

> Any target-culture text for which there are reasons to tentatively posit the existence of another text, in another culture/language, from which it was presumably derived by transfer operations and to which it is now tied by a set of relationships based on shared features, some of which may be regarded—within the culture in question—as necessary and/or sufficient (Toury, 2012, p. 31).

Of interest here is that, in Toury's (2012, p. 26-28) mind, his characterization of translation is a broad, open one. However, seen by today's standards, it appears quite constrained, as Karen Korning Zethsen points out:

> Toury's definition is likely to exclude many intralingual (or intersemiotic) translations [...] because of two *necessary conditions*; to constitute a translation a transfer process must have taken place *between two languages/cultures* and most importantly the resulting product must be *assumed to be a translation* by people in general (Zethsen, 2009, p. 799).

Indeed, according to Toury (2012), for there to be translation, a text must minimally have been transferred from one language/culture to another. I therefore broadly agree with his definition, which might seem surprising as Toury is generally hailed for his inclusive perspective on translation (e.g., Tymoczko, 2014, p. 80-81).

2.3 Meylaerts and Marais's views on translation

Just as many other like-minded scholars, Reine Meylaerts & Kobus Marais (2023a) regard *translation* as a very encompassing object/phenomenon. I have chosen to discuss their specific case here, but numerous authors in TS indeed share similar views.

In the introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Theory and Concepts* that they edited together (2023b), Meylaerts & Marais (2023a, p. 3) state that they think of translation "not only in linguistic and anthropocentric terms but also as a semiotic process that takes place in and between all (living) organisms—human and non-human alike". This conception leads them to propose the following examples:

> Not only the translation of Hamlet into French, or of oral speech into subtitles, but also communication between dolphins or between a dog and its companion, or moving a statue from one place to another, or rewatching a film are translation processes (Meylaerts & Marais, 2023a, p. 3).

Upon reading this passage, I am left to wonder... Why would dolphins need to translate among themselves? Can't they just "talk"? Is moving a statue in a museum really a form of translation, beyond the obvious spatial and kinetic sense of the word? How can rewatching a film be regarded as translation? Because a process of reinterpretation is involved? In fact, according to such a characterization, just about any *process* seems to be tantamount to a *translation process*.

Later in their introductory chapter, they sum up their view of *translation* by defining it as "the work performed to impose constraints on a semiosic process" and add that "such an expanded definition does not mean that everything *is* a translation but that many things have a translational *dimension*" (Meylaerts & Marais, 2023a, p. 3-4). So, while not everything may be translation to them, they nevertheless seem inclined to find some amount of it in many unusual places, to say the least.

With this in mind, I contend that the disconnect between their idea of *translation* and the commonly accepted notion of *translation* is too great to be acceptable and that it thus constitutes a case of infelicitous conceptual stretching. In this regard, Luc van Doorslaer (2019, p. 228) ponders the following question: "Some distance between the discourse in academia and the outside world is

acceptable, but can that distance be overstretched?". In Meylaerts & Marais's (2023a) case, just as in many others, I believe the answer is "yes", but that, of course, remains an open question.

At any rate, another issue with Meylaerts & Marais is their understanding of the term *intersemiotic*, for example when they write the following: "For instance, translating a written English text into a spoken French text is simultaneously *interlingual and intersemiotic translation*, and translating a written English text into a spoken English text is simultaneously *intralingual and intersemiotic translation*" (Meylaerts & Marais, 2023a, p. 7, my emphasis). The problem is that going from the written to the spoken, or vice versa, is not to change *semiotic systems* but to change *modes* or *media*, depending on the school of thought. Incidentally, going from one language to another can be regarded as either a "mere" change of *linguistic systems* or a complete change of *semiotic systems*. Here again, it all depends on who you follow.

Given this confusing situation, the notable case of intrasemiotic translation will be brought into the discussion in the following section, together with other relevant notions.

3. Terminological and conceptual issues around *translation* in TS

In the above-mentioned volume edited by Meylaerts & Marais (2023b), in the first part of a chapter co-written with Susan Petrilli, Margherita Zanoletti writes that "traditional conceptions of translation have only included *intrasemiotic translation*, and almost exclusively *its subcategory interlingual translation*" (Petrilli & Zanoletti, 2023, p. 342, my emphasis). Accordingly, this means that Zanoletti (and Petrilli as well?) considers interlingual translation, or translation proper, a type of intrasemiotic translation. This view is also that of Henrik Gottlieb who uses "the term 'intrasemiotic translation' […] as an umbrella term for Jakobson's 'interlingual' and 'intralingual' types of translation" (2005, p. 35; see also Gottlieb, 2018, p. 46-47).

Now, despite largely agreeing with Toury on this matter, Gottlieb (2018, p. 46) misinterprets him when he laments that "even translation scholars like Gideon Toury tend to see languages as different systems". Before going any further, an ambiguity needs to be cleared up: authors often use the terms *system* and *systemic* without specifying what kind of system they mean, but here, Gottlieb (2018, p. 46) means *semiotic systems*. In fact, for Toury ([1986]1994), natural languages are *linguistic systems* of their own (e.g., as in Saussure's *langue*), but together form a single united "linguistic" *semiotic system*[2]. This view that all natural languages compose one extensive semiotic system is shared by other TS scholars including Ubaldo Stecconi (2007, p. 17-18) who writes that "semiotics is a general theory of signs which regards natural language as just one semiotic system among many". Similarly, Panagiotis Sakellariou (2012, p. 681) mentions that "subtitling is clearly intrasemiotic, because it concerns two different natural languages which, as such, belong to the same semiotic system".

In contrast with those views, Klaus Kaindl (2013, p. 261) argues that "the term intersemiotic translation is unfortunate because a language is also a semiotic system, and thus the translation between two language systems would logically be an intersemiotic translation". Likewise, Evangelos

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[2] Strangely enough, however, Gottlieb (2018, p. 51) later rightly states that "the term 'intrasemiotic translation'—also used by Toury (1986)—encompasses Jakobson's interlingual and intralingual types of translation". For a good account of Toury ([1986]1994), see Sütiste and Torop (2007, p. 197-199) and Kaindl (2013, p. 261).

Kourdis (2015, p. 303) contends that translation "involves the transition from one semiotic system (source language) to another (target language)".

I could keep citing examples from both sides, but the conclusion would remain the same: clearly, there is no consensus on whether all natural languages make up one semiotic system or whether each language has (or "is") its own semiotic system. Yet, the implications are important as, depending on the answer, typical "translation proper" is either intrasemiotic or intersemiotic. At any rate, as mentioned earlier, *interlinguistic translation* is not on the same level as the "semiotic" categories; it is under one or the other.

In a similar vein, it appears that we cannot agree on what a *mode* or a *medium* is. In a nutshell, some scholars view natural language as a single united "mode" with speech and writing as different "media" through which it is realized (e.g., Stöckl, 2004, p. 11; Kaindl, 2013, p. 261), whereas others regard speech and writing as distinct "modes" altogether (e.g., Kress, 2010, p. 86; Gottlieb, 2018, p. 51). Other examples could be added to the list, but it would be to no avail. That said, as far as I am aware, unlike Meylaerts & Marais (2023a, p. 7), semioticians do not consider the conversion from the spoken to the written, or the other way around, a change of semiotic systems: it is a change of either *modes* (e.g., Gottlieb's *diamesic*, 2018, pp. 59-60) or *media* (e.g., Kaindl's *intermedial*, 2013, p. 262)[3].

With all of the above in mind, I believe the following observation from Luis Pérez González sums up the overall situation quite well:

> The lack of consensus on where the referential boundaries between seemingly interchangeable terms—such as "medium", "mode", or "sign system"—lie ultimately exposes the need for a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the semiotic fabric of translated and interpreted texts (Pérez González, 2014, p. 120).

This problem of terms being used interchangeably is also mentioned by Elisabetta Adami (2023, p. 378) with regard to the words *multimodal* and *multimedia*. Another related issue is that authors often prefer to coin terms rather than use existing ones (Chesterman, 2017, p. 232). However, most frustrating is perhaps the tendency for many authors, for instance with regard to the case at hand (i.e., the intrasemiotic vs. intersemiotic nature of interlingual translation and the definition of *mode* vs. *medium*), to present their view on things as an obvious truth, when it is, in actuality, a mere opinion, as confirmed by the very fact that the opposite position also exists (see the section titled "Risky rhetoric" in Chesterman, 2019, p. 21-23).

At any rate, given this situation, TS scholars can freely claim that typical "translation proper" is *isomesic* (Gottlieb, 2018, p. 51), *intramedial* (Kaindl, 2013, p. 262), *intramodal* (Adami, 2023, p. 384)… That said, the intrasemiotic vs. intersemiotic nature of interlingual translation is ultimately not a question for TS to answer, but for semiotics, as it regards the semiotic status of language(s). Equally, where to draw the line between languages and varieties, an issue which bears on the

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[3] To make matters even more complicated, Kaindl's (2013, p. 261) concept of *medium* possesses two meanings, i.e., "the respective form of performance (e.g. opera, theatre, comic) [and] its material communication channels (writing, radio, TV, electronic media, etc.)". This means that two very different things such as making a film from a novel (a process that is often considered intersemiotic translation in TS but regarded as adaptation just about anywhere else) and reading a text out loud (which almost no one thinks of as translation) are both intermedial types of translation according to Kaindl (2013), as they respectively happen across "forms of performance" and "material communication channels".

concepts of *interlinguistic* and *intralinguistic* translation (see van Doorslaer, 2019, p. 221), is not a problem for TS to solve, but for linguistics, as it has to do with the definition of *languages* and *(dia)lects*. To be clear, while I reject the idea that we necessarily need to think of translation in terms of semiotics, linguistics, or any other specific discipline, I recognize that some questions are best left to competent specialists. Coincidentally, these questions also include Meylaerts & Marais's (2023a, p. 3) examples cited earlier (which could be summed up as "animal communication", "exhibit design", and "film reception") since I do not think that most TS scholars are experts in such distant and disparate domains.

In the end, however, questions such as the one on the intersemiotic vs. intrasemiotic status of typical "translation proper" are not the most pressing ones. Indeed, more troubling is that the reason why intrasemiotic translation is almost always disregarded in TS seems to be that Jakobson did not mention it in his seminal text (1959) and that only a few scholars have reflected on the question since. This telling example thus serves to show that despite countless texts on the matter, the conceptualization of *translation* and related notions in TS partly rests on insufficiently expounded and challenged ideas. The fact that these terms and concepts are fraught with fuzziness and vagueness might be one of the reasons for this unfortunate state of affairs.

4. A rationale for a "narrow" and "a priori" (re)definition of *translation*

In light of all of the above, the question that now arises is whether we should keep the term *translation* for all possible types of transfers, whatever that means, or perhaps even make it a synonym of *process*. To try and answer this question, I will provide a few arguments to support my position, namely that the term *translation* should only be used for "translation proper", i.e., interlinguistic translation.

4.1 TS's relationship with Adaptation Studies: A case of "disciplinary imperialism"?

First, I consider TS to be engaged in a sort of "disciplinary imperialism" by which it more or less actively appropriates for itself objects and phenomena of research that logically or naturally belong to other disciplines, for example, Adaptation Studies (hereafter AS), essentially in the case of intersemiotic translation. Before going any further, it seems helpful to quote Patrick Cattrysse who outlines the basic differences between *translation* and *adaptation*:

> If, for the sake of the argument, we accept the common western usage of the word 'translation' as *the accurate rendition of a verbal expression in another natural language*, and we accept also the everyday definition of the word 'adaptation' as *change that maintains or obtains relevance*, then one could say that a scholar studying linguistic phenomena such as translations, and another one studying film adaptations, would clearly be doing two distinct things (Cattrysse, 2019, p. 219).

To be clear, I do not argue that TS scholars should not study non-interlinguistic phenomena, nor that the tools (concepts, theories, models, methods, and so on) developed within TS cannot be successfully put to work to study such objects. Rather, my position is simply that since other disciplines make these objects and phenomena their focus (unlike TS, whose de facto core is

interlinguistic translation), we should perhaps not tread too much on these other fields' toes. Indeed, there is theoretically no reason why other disciplines could not do to TS what TS does to them. For instance, AS could decide to call "translation proper" *interlinguistic adaptation*, thereby denying the concept of *translation*. At any rate, we should remember that TS was once the victim of such a state of affairs, i.e., when academic discourses on translation were still dominated by linguistics and literary studies. So, put differently, we should perhaps not do to other disciplines such as AS what was done to TS when it was much younger, smaller, and weaker. That said, a caveat needs to be added here: I believe it is perfectly fine to regard adaptation *as* translation, by using what Andrew Chesterman (2017, p. 228-231) calls the *hermeneutic as*. However, it is a whole different thing for TS authors to performatively appropriate themselves *adaptation* by declaring it *is* (a kind of) *translation* (see Chesterman, 2019, p. 21-23).

To show that this is not a made-up issue, let me cite AS scholar Laurence Raw (2017a, p. 2), who contends that "to view adaptation as a subaltern discipline to translation [is] a viewpoint shared by many established translation studies scholars" and who emphasizes that AS should not be treated as such (Raw, 2017b, p. 495; see also Cattrysse, 2019, 2020). Similarly, van Doorslaer & Raw (2016, p. 193-194) explain that "the problem AS has with TS stems from the belief that as TS has been established longer, and has a broader focus of interest, it might swallow up AS".

There is here an interesting parallel to draw between "narrow" definitions of *translation* being sometimes decried as Eurocentric and the imperialist-like way in which many TS scholars seek to expand the discipline, no matter how much they need to encroach on other fields' territory to do so. Again, I am arguing not for TS scholars to quit being curious but rather for mutual respect between disciplines and acknowledgment of their respective fields of expertise.

What is more, in contrast to TS where enlarging the meaning of *translation* has almost become a political agenda, in AS, "broad" views on the discipline's range seem extremely reasonable:

> More contemporary definitions of adaptation have opened up the field in a variety of ways, extending its scope well beyond the case-study interactions that link a literary and a cinematic text to include, for example, adaptations of music, television programs, videogames, and the Internet, and concentrating, for instance, on the pressures of different historical periods and different cultural geographies as they shape these new adaptive practices (Corrigan, 2017, p. 31).

The resulting characterization of *adaptation*, close to what TS scholars understand as "intersemiotic translation", is largely in line with Lars Elleström's (2017, p. 512) definition of the concept: "a medium represents again, but in a different way, some characteristics that have already been represented by another kind of medium". In sum, as far as I understand, unlike TS with *translation*, very few AS scholars seriously advocate for the field to deal with senses of the word *adaptation* that are not related to "art" in the broad sense[4]. In any case, I think AS would, paradoxically, have a better case than TS for expanding the field as, from a conceptual viewpoint, *adaptation* appears intrinsically more extensive than *translation*.

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[4] But see, e.g., Boyd (2017) for inspiration from biological adaptation and Elliott (2020, p. 181-191) for a fresh perspective on adaptation.

4.2 The onomasiological vs. semasiological impasse

Another reason why we should use an "a priori" definition of *translation* in most cases is the quagmire that would ensue from trying to find all the words ever used to denote "translation" across languages and cultures over centuries and millennia and, from there, decide to stitch together the various senses of these words to compose a universal, all-embracing definition of *translation*. I consider such an undertaking doomed to failure because we could begin with even a narrow meaning of *translation* to collect words that can somehow be taken to mean *translation* (onomasiological stage). Then, we could lend the concept a much broader meaning than the one we started with as we would combine the other senses of these words (semasiological stage). Theoretically, this onomasiological/semasiological procedure could be repeated indefinitely.

In short, the concept of *translation* would exponentially grow to swallow just about any object and phenomenon of study. I therefore believe that the only practical way out of this never-ending spiral is to use a sensible "narrow" definition of the concept, one that is broadly agreed upon "a priori", i.e., that of interlinguistic translation. I could also invoke the principle of brevity or the Gricean maxim of manner: for example, why would you go out of your way to call something an *intralinguistic translation* when more precise and shorter terms such as *popularization* and *rewording* exist? The same logic can be applied conversely: why would you use the labels *interlinguistic rewriting* or *interlinguistic adaptation* when we have the term *translation*? In most cases, the briefer (and the fewer adjectives), the better.

Additionally, some TS scholars who advocate a semasiological approach to (re)defining or broadening the concept of *translation* (e.g., Blumczynski, 2023) mainly use the English label "translation" as a starting point. This has the drawback of yielding Anglocentric results since the exploration is based on the usage of the word and its derivatives in English specifically. For instance, the notion of *translational research*, defined by Rubio *et al.* (2010, p. 471) as an approach which "fosters the multidirectional integration of basic research, patient-oriented research, and population-based research, with the long-term aim of improving the health of the public" is commonly translated into French by the term *recherche translationnelle* and into Japanese by the term 橋渡し研究 [hashiwatashikenkyū], to give just two examples. While the adjective *translational* in English relates to both (1) "movement" and (2) (linguistic) "translation" (among other senses), in French, two different adjectives are used for these meanings: (1) *translationnel* and (2) *traductionnel* (or *traductif*). This means that the expression *recherche translationnelle* used in French has nothing to do with (linguistic) translation. The case of Japanese is even more patent since 橋渡し [hashiwatashi] means not (linguistic) "translation" (the usual Japanese word for translation is 翻訳 [hon'yaku]) but rather "mediation" or, more literally, "bridge building" (研究 [kenkyū] simply means "research"). In short, while there is some connection, albeit superficial, in English between (linguistic) *translation* and *translational research*, there is no such connection in either French or Japanese, among other languages. Simply put, the semasiological approach is highly language dependent.

Now, while I have criticized the semasiological approach in the above paragraph, I need to stress that the onomasiological approach is not necessarily better as it is extremely easy for some TS scholars to see some amount of "translationess" or "translationality" in just about anything, as

was shown in Section 2.3 with reference to Meylaerts & Marais (2023a). As meaning making and pattern finding beings, we humans tend to find what we are looking for, sometimes when it is not even there, which is one of the pitfalls of such an onomasiological approach.

4.3 The paradoxical stance of many TS scholars toward translation

In their introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Translation Studies* on the topic of "(re-)conceptualizing translation in translation studies", the guest editors explain the following:

> While the call for papers has attracted quite a number of abstracts in which potential contributors explained what they wanted to discuss, it transpired, somewhat disappointingly, that the majority of translation scholars still think of translation primarily as an interlingual practice or, at most, an intersemiotic one. As guest editors, we have endeavoured to encourage contributors to think outside of the box in the topics they chose, to shed the fetters of the old ways in which translation is being conceptualized, and try to discover new thought-provoking dimensions, even to venture outside the boundaries of the discipline of TS as it is known today (Zheng *et al.*, 2023, p. 175).

In sum, while the guest editors strived to elicit "thought-provoking" conceptualizations of translation, they faced the reality that most TS scholars see translation chiefly as "an interlingual practice" (Zheng *et al.*, 2023, p. 175). Now, my inkling is that while most TS scholars like to say that they root for a broad definition of *translation*, it appears that their own research is essentially based on a narrow view of the concept. The following statement from Zethsen & Aage Hill-Madsen partly echoes this impression:

> Roman Jakobson's tripartite typology of translation is accepted by many translation scholars as a broad definition of translation and is frequently included in the beginning of textbooks introducing Translation Studies. However, when it comes to the research carried out within Translation Studies, focus is overwhelmingly set on interlingual translation, or translation proper (Zethsen & Hill-Madsen, 2016, p. 692; see also Mossop, 2019, p. 90).

More empirical research is needed to verify the existence of such a paradox in the discipline. A possible approach would be to conduct surveys with TS scholars on their conception of *translation* and their actual research output. If it can be shown that researchers in the field indeed do not practice what they preach, this could be a further argument in favour of uninhibitedly refocusing TS on interlinguistic translation.

4.4 The "broader is better" fallacy

From a psychosociological perspective, I would argue that broad definitions of *translation* are sometimes used by TS scholars as a sort of virtue-signalling tool, i.e., as a way to display open-mindedness, inclusiveness, and progressiveness as these values are highly regarded in today's society, and even more so in the academic world. In short, who wants to be seen as small-minded, exclusionary, and conservative? Incidentally, I agree with Mossop:

> There is an annoying tendency in the Translation Studies literature to assume that broadening the scope of 'translating' beyond interlingual work is an inherently good thing. As a result, the 'burden of proof' seems to lie with those opposing such broadening rather than those supporting it. In my view, all-encompassing definitions of an object of study are unlikely to advance knowledge because they must by nature be unfocussed (Mossop, 2019, p. 90).

In the same vein, Cattrysse argues for narrower definitions of both *translation* and *adaptation*:

> The more specific a category, the better one can distinguish it from what it is not. Hence, paradoxically, a more narrow and homogeneous category may help the scholar widen the analytical scope and perceive a wider palette of more diversified hyper–hypotextual relationships. In the case of translational and adaptational phenomena, specifying within-category features and between-category borderlines enables researchers to describe and explain more precisely what they have been observing for decades: that texts may at once hold parts that translate, and other parts that adapt (Cattrysse, 2019, p. 218).

At any rate, I believe it is high time that we challenged the dogma according to which broader is necessarily better and that we unearthed its roots, which may be feeding on latent psychological and sociological dynamics.

4.5 The (professional) practice of translation and its relevance to TS

From the perspective of (professional) practice, it seems fair to submit that out of the Jakobsonian types of translation (i.e., intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic), what translators do most of the time revolves around so-called interlingual translation. The other types of activities can, of course, be carried out by translators. However, in the case of so-called intralingual translation, the bulk of the work is probably done by professionals such as public scriveners, writers, journalists, popularizers, revisers, editors, and so on. In the case of so-called intersemiotic translation, the work is likely carried out by artists and experts such as filmmakers, stage directors, playwrights, choreographers, musicians, painters, poets, novelists, creative writers, and so on.

Moreover, according to a focus group-based study conducted by Helle V. Dam & Zethsen (2019), translators and translation project managers see, for instance, *adaptation* and *transcreation* as closer to *translation* (proper) than *intralingual translation* and *intersemiotic translation*. In fact, the practitioners who participated in the study rejected intralingual and intersemiotic translation as being part of the broad notion of *translation*—"partial rejection in the case of the former and full rejection in the case of the latter" (Dam & Zethsen, 2019, p. 217). Additionally, a recent study by the same authors building on the previous one yielded similar results (Dam & Zethsen, 2024).

To sum up my point, I do not think we can, from our "ivory tower", reject what is "out there". My position is thus akin to that of Susan Bassnett, in dialogue with Anthony Pym:

> Remember when Salman Rushdie announced that 'we are all translated men', when he was referring not to language but to migration? Harish Trivedi then fulminated about that kind of thinking, pointing out that back in multilingual India people were getting on with the business of translation conducted across languages and were not engaging in the abstractions that appeal to intellectuals in the comfort of their English-speaking salons. But the idea of translation as a loosely conceived metaphorical concept has spread, to the detriment of

attention being paid to what actually happens when you take a text in one language and try to put it into another (Bassnett & Pym, 2017, p. 150).

Besides, we need to keep in mind that one of the reasons why TS can shine the way it does is that there is a need for translator training for real-world purposes. As Christina Schäffner (2013, p. 19) reminds us, "in translator training programmes, we tend to operate with a more traditional concept which involves transfer across languages and cultures". In sum, the viability of TS is, at least in part, dependent upon that of professional, interlinguistic, translation.

4.6 The lay and dictionary definitions of *translation*

From the perspective of definitions, there is little doubt that, at least today, most people around the world, if asked, "What is translation?" (using the closest equivalent for *translation* in their language), would answer something along the lines of "it is about moving a text from one language into another". Such a lay definition would also overlap dictionary definitions in most, if not all, languages. Indeed, what all possible terms for *translation* have in common is precisely that sense, which has to do with the interlinguistic transfer of a text. Maria Tymoczko herself acknowledges that reality when she writes the following:

> If asked to define translation, most ordinary people and even most translation experts would probably say that the answer is straightforward: a translation is the process or result of transferring a text from one language into a text in another language (Tymoczko, 2014, p. 54; see also Hermans, 2013, p. 75).

Moreover, as Marais has shown through a study of the terms used to name *translation* in various South African languages, "the different words for translation have one denotative meaning only, namely the same as the English word 'translation.' It does not connote any tradition or any different conceptualization about translation itself" (Marais, 2021, p. 315; but see Blumczynski, 2023). This means that the metaphor conveyed through the etymology of the word used for *translation* in a given language has no bearing on the way people who speak that language conceive of translation. In my view, to believe that it does is to commit the etymological fallacy. Indeed, while studies such as Yves Gambier's (2018) based on the analysis of different terms used to refer to translation in various languages of the world are interesting as such, they are not of much use to understand how people actually think of translation, let alone to understand what translation is really about.

In sum, to "restrict" translation to the interlinguistic is in line with what people (and most translators) think *translation* is and what dictionaries say *translation* is, peripheral senses of the word put aside. Indeed, these accessory senses are precisely the ones that tend to vary according to linguistic and cultural tradition. And, when they are shared across remote or unrelated languages and cultures, it is, in most cases certainly, due to a process of loan or borrowing, not because of some conceptual relationship on a fundamental level.

5. Toward a "narrow" and "a priori" definition of *translation*

I have advanced a few arguments to advocate my position, but there are possibly many more. At any rate, with all of the above in mind, the following definition of *translation* from Juliane House seems a promising candidate:

> Translation can be defined as the result of a linguistic-textual operation in which a text in one language is re-contextualized in another language. As a linguistic-textual operation, translation is, however, subject to, and substantially influenced by, a variety of extra-linguistic factors and conditions. It is this interaction between 'inner' linguistic-textual and 'outer' extra-linguistic, contextual factors that make translation such a complex phenomenon (House, 2015, p. 2).

As House aptly explains, to say that translation is (the result of) a linguistic-textual operation from one language into another does not negate the vital role of "outer" factors such as ideology and norms. However, it does imply that *translation* roughly is (1) a *process* that starts with an "old" text in a given language and ends with (2) a *product*, i.e., a "new" text in another language. The processual side of this definition corresponds to the mostly cognitive *translation act*, which is embedded in a broader sociological *translation event*. What is done during the *translation act* is the actual *translating*, but many other *translatorial actions* are, of course, carried out throughout the *translation event*. All this is simply to say that translators indeed do more than "just" translate.

Now, given that *language* is part of *culture*, I believe we could use the expression "interlinguistic and intercultural transfer". However, this need not be overemphasized, as we could probably add more concepts to the list anyway (e.g., *society*). As for the notion of *transfer*, I think that the concepts of *transformation* or *recreation*, for instance, could be used instead. The same goes for *text*; I deem *discourse* or *parole* other viable options. To be clear, I do not contend that *transfer*, *transformation*, and *recreation* or *text*, *discourse*, and *parole* mean the same thing; there are, of course, important conceptual distinctions between these notions. Rather, my point simply is that the single most important, but especially immutable word of all to describe translation is, in my view, *interlinguistic*.

A definition such as mine might not account for all possible cases, especially from a historical perspective. However, I believe that it is preferable to cover most relevant instances with a closed definition that excludes, for example, *pseudotranslations* (which are nonetheless valid objects for TS; see Bueno Maia *et al.*, 2018) than to catch too many instances with an open definition or none at all by renouncing to define the concept altogether. In fact, I believe my definition (or House's) is neither "narrow" nor "a priori"; to me, it is "just right" and "evidence-based". More specifically, in contrast to "additive" approaches, such as prototype theory (see Halverson, 1999) and cluster concepts (see Tymoczko, 2014) in which each potential sense of *translation* is lumped into the broad concept, my approach could be called "subtractive" in that it seeks to find the essence or least common denominator of that thing we call *translation* (see also Chesterman, 2019, p. 14-18, on *splitter concepts* and *lumper concepts*).

It is also important to note that my so-called narrow conception of *translation* is much wider than that of many people in the translation industry or the academic world, let alone that of the general public. As Schäffner points out concerning the language service industry, with labels such as

transcreation and *localization* gaining more and more ground, the concept of *translation* is increasingly being relegated to a meaning of "literal translation and purely linguistic encoding which does not involve any creativity" (Schäffner, 2013, p. 23; see also Gambier, 2023, p. 319). The perception of *translation* is not much better in academia, even in disciplines close to TS, as Roberto A. Valdeón explains: "For academics working in other areas in the Humanities and Social Sciences, translation is often understood as literal translation" (Valdeón, 2017, p. 183; see also van Doorslaer, 2019, p. 222-228). In such a context, it seems to me that, before trying to widen *translation* (and TS) to include extremely borderline or downright eccentric cases, the priority should be to convince the language industry, the academic community, and people in general that translation is indeed a tremendously complex activity that certainly cannot be reduced to "a mechanic literal reproduction of the source text" (Schäffner, 2013, p. 24).

6. Toward an "overarching" concept and discipline?

While I understand the need for a superordinate (or hyperonymic) term that would encompass all so-called translational phenomena, I do not think we, as *Translation* Studies scholars, get to decide that the label should be "translation", obviously because of the gross conflict of interest. Moreover, the problem of the arbitrariness of the designation remains: why use "translation" and not any other one? "Translation" is not, inherently, the only valid label, and it is certainly not the best umbrella term either. In this regard, Cattrysse argues the following:

> From a categorical perspective, there is no need to inflate the name of one specific sub-category of text-processing (e.g. 'translation' or 'adaptation') to signify the superordinate category of all types of text-processing. […] There are perfectly good terms in place such as 'intertextuality,' 'interdiscursivity' or 'intermediality' for that purpose (Cattrysse, 2020, p. 44-45).

Elsewhere, Cattrysse (2019, p. 206) also proposes "intertextuality or influence studies" as a possible encompassing discipline for both TS and AS: "perhaps, instead of trying to absorb each other, AS and TS should consider themselves rather as siblings, that is, members of a larger family called intertextuality or influence studies".

Another possible solution is the idea of *transfer*, as was advocated by Itamar Even-Zohar (1981). I therefore tend to agree with Shaul Levin, who considers translation a type of *transfer*:

> In the most general terms, an umbrella-like theory of transfer would deal with how things get from here to there, and what happens to them as they do. Translation studies could hold a venerable position among the disciplines investigating the various manifestations of transfer and contributing to the ongoing development of the umbrella theory. Unearthing the nature of the relationship between translational and non-translational transferential phenomena would help delineate more clearly the position of translation studies and its object of study among its sister disciplines (Levin, 2021, p. 102).

Similarly, although van Doorslaer (2019, p. 228) believes that "exclusively dealing with translation proper […] would throw the discipline back a couple of decades in time", he also writes the following:

> Of course, the most difficult question would be whether a generally acceptable umbrella term that would cover TS's current activities exists. What is the common ground of all these subfields and practices—the transfer of information? The transformation of information? It is no coincidence that many of the derived and newly coined terms include trans-. If it were not for the fact that popular discourses might associate it with transgender or transport, trans-studies could have covered many of the alternative terms for translation (van Doorslaer, 2019, p. 229).

At any rate, I think we need to keep looking for a truly "generic" term, unlike *translation*, or perhaps even *transfer*, that is neither loaded nor worn out. To cite another example, according to Brian Harris (2016), that label could be *conversion*. But, in light of the persistent calls to regard translation as a semiotic (or semiosic?) activity, the mother discipline could perhaps be semiotics, after all. That said, TS should not be subservient to any "supra" discipline, whatever it is. And, above all, I believe that *translation* should be about the transfer of a text from one language into another, and so should TS for the most part.

7. Avenues for future research

Obviously, most of what I have written here would benefit from more empirical evidence and theoretical reflection. I could therefore suggest many paths for future research, but I will mention only two main strands.

In discussing the issue with TS scholars, one thing that strikes me is that we cannot agree on what the "dominant" viewpoint is regarding the debate on "narrow" vs. "broad" definitions of *translation*. Specifically, I argue that many TS authors approve of a broad concept of *translation* in principle but do very little to that end in practice. However, some scholars insist that the "dominant" or even "hegemonic" position in TS is almost the opposite, namely that most researchers believe in a narrow view of *translation*, period. On this point, Dam, Matilde Nisbeth Brøgger and Zethsen argue the following:

> There may be disagreements about the interpretation of the various defining concepts, but, there seems to be consensus that for an activity to be called translation, and thus belong to the field of translation studies, some kind of source text has to exist and some kind of transfer has to take place involving two different languages (Dam *et al.*, 2019, p. 232).

In view of all that has been cited in this paper (not to mention all that could not be, for reasons of space), I contend that there is no such consensus, as many "expansionist" TS scholars would strongly disagree with this definition. In any case, stuck in such a dead end, what would be needed is a survey with active TS scholars asking them what they think *translation* is or is not, while considering various parameters such as age, country/region, position, and language(s). In my view, this would be a significant contribution to the debate, as we would hopefully be able to find some common ground, at least about the current state of affairs regarding the conception of the notion of *translation* in TS.

Another avenue that should be explored as a counterpoint to past and current approaches to defining *translation* (see Hermans, 2013) is the tradition initiated by political scientist Giovanni Sartori (1970) and refined by scholars such as David Collier & James E. Mahon Jr. (1993) and Collier

and Steven Levitsky (1997). Put simply, if we are looking for a broad denomination to account for the broad concept of "translation", perhaps we should go "up the ladder of abstraction" (or rather "up the ladder of generalization"; see note 5 in Collier & Mahon Jr., 1993, p. 853). This could allow us to avoid *conceptual stretching* by helping us find a more naturally encompassing concept than that of *translation*, as we might have artificially inflated that one more than it can reasonably handle. Incidentally, this avenue is in line with the proposals laid out in Section 6.

8. Concluding remarks

Summing up, I believe that we should keep the word *translation* just for, put simply, "translation proper" and accept that so-called intralinguistic, intersemiotic, and intrasemiotic translation could easily be renamed adaptation, parody, rewriting, imitation, reinterpretation, popularization, transmutation, refraction, recreation, modernization, and so on, depending on the case at hand. In other words, *translation* cannot be a synonym or a hypernym of just about any loosely related idea. Along the same lines, Pym (2010, p. 16) writes that he "suspect[s], unfashionably, that translation is not all communication, not even all cross-cultural communication, and not all communication is translation".

A lot has been said and written on the matter I have taken up in this paper, so much so in fact that I could cite only a tiny fraction of the relevant (and recent) contributions I have encountered (e.g., Kwok, 2022; Litwin, 2023; Carvalho & Lourenço, 2023; Marais, 2024; Moreno Tovar & van Doorslaer, 2024; Pöchhacker, 2024). While I do not claim to have presented a watertight rationale for a point of view such as mine, I believe I have pointed to a few arguments that may be worth considering by TS scholars, wherever they stand on this issue.

Now, zooming out slightly from this specific problem, I cannot help but wonder… What is it with TS scholars that always makes us want to "expand", "broaden", and "enlarge" the discipline and make everything to be about translation? Interestingly, Fabio Regattin (2024, p. 112) has recently asked the very same question in an article on the history of TS's "expansions". Some would probably answer that if TS does not expand, it will die off. But is this a good, scientifically sound reason for enlarging the discipline, for broadening the concept? At any rate, this current trend in TS, both outward-looking (expansionist, imperialist, etc.) and inward-looking (egocentric, narcissistic, etc.), seems problematic to me as it takes us further away every day from the heart of the matter. Indeed, as Mossop (2016, p. 20) rightly reminds us, "it was a great achievement to constitute a discipline, Translation Studies (TS), that was focused on interlingual work, and this achievement must not be diluted". Besides, it is not as if we already understand everything there is to be understood about interlinguistic translation. And, on a side note, in this age of artificial intelligence, how did we get to the current situation in which we hear scholars complain about the so-called anthropocentric bias of TS? Wasn't translation supposed to be a primarily human activity?

Once again, I am not against a broader, "supra" discipline based on a broader, "supra" concept. But that discipline cannot be (called) *Translation Studies*; we need something more neutral and less arbitrary, and the same goes for the core concept of that discipline. Additionally, a heightened sense of critical thinking is required, as illustrated notably by the unfortunate treatment

of *intrasemiotic translation* in TS. Last but certainly not least, it is to be hoped that more dissident voices will be expressed and, hopefully, heard.

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