Translation Studies: A brief history of the discipline

Translational phenomena, variously defined as an “art,” a “craft,” or a “science”, date back to the third millennium BC:

The Babylon of Hammurabi’s day (2100 B.C.) was a polyglot city, and much of the official business of the empire was made possible by corps of scribes who translated edicts into various languages.¹

Translation theory aims at determining, categorizing, and ultimately utilizing general principles of the translation process in relation to its major issues.² Translation theories can be divided diachronically into three main categories:

1. Translation theories based on Source-oriented approaches
2. Linguistic translation theories
3. Recent translation theories

From the 2nd Century B.C. until the last century, all theoretical frameworks developed under Source-oriented approaches were concerned with what a translator must or must not do. The principle focus was on the closeness to the source text as regards both meaning and form. In other words, the translator needed to reproduce the text, in all its aspects, as a target text.
For example, Etienne Dolet of France (1509-46) devised one of the first theories of translation. He established five essential principles for translators which can be classified under Source-oriented theories:

1. The translator must fully understand the sense and meaning of the original author, although he is at liberty to clarify obscurities.
2. The translator should have a perfect knowledge of both SL and TL.
3. The translator should avoid word-for-word renderings.
4. The translator should use forms of speech in common use.
5. The translator should choose and order words appropriately to produce the correct tone.

George Chapman, the famous translator of Homer, restated these principles into the following, in 1598:

1. Avoid word-for-word rendering
2. Attempt to reach the ‘spirit’ of the original
3. Avoid over loose translations, by basing the translation on a sound scholarly investigation of other versions and glosses

Two centuries later, Alexander Frazer Tytler published *The Principles of Translation*, a systematic study of the translation process in English and stated the following principles:

1. The translation should give a complete transcript of the idea of the original work.
2. The style and manner of writing should be the same character with that of the original.
3- The translation should have all the ease of the original composition.

According to Matthew Arnold translator must focus on SL text primarily and must serve that text with complete commitment. The TL reader must be brought to the SL text through the means of translation.⁶

H.W. Longfellow is even more committed to the ST and the author. He argues:

(...) the business of a translator is to report what the author says, not to explain what he means; that is the work of the commentator. What an author says and how he says it, that is the problem of the translator.⁷

St. Jerome’s suggestions about how to render translation can be considered another example of Source-oriented theories:

St. Jerome already stated that Bible translations must respect the exact form of the source text because God’s word must not be tampered with whereas in secular texts the translator should strive to render the meaning of the source text.⁸

Conversely, linguistic translation theories have a history dated from the 1900s which has lasted for approximately half a century. At that time, translation was absorbed into the discipline of linguistics. That means that it
was conceived as a branch of linguistics, and not as an independent science. These theories became headed as linguistic studies rather than as translation studies.

During that time, translation theory was regarded as a part of linguistic communication based on “Information Theory”. This theory defines language as a ‘code.’ During communication, speakers or writers encode what they want to say and the listeners or readers, who share the same code, would decode it. Therefore, translation is a special case of communication because sender and receiver do not share the same code; the translator recodes the message from the sender into the receiver code. The main issue of translation is to sustain the original message despite that there is generally no one-to-one correspondence between the signs of the two different code systems.

These theories were also basically source-oriented, normative, synchronic and focused on process as in the previous period.

At last, in the last three decades of the 20th century Translation Studies started to become an autonomous science. James Holmes, an American poet and translator coined the term Translation Studies for this new scientific
approach. He believes that the main intention of Translation Studies is the development of a full and comprehensive translation theory.⁹

At that time, the most influential theories posited were the “Skopos Theory,” the “Relevance Theory,” and the Target-Oriented Approach. The proponent of the Skopos Theory was Hans Vermer, who views the translation process and the teaching of it as a substantial revision of the linguistic attitude. This considers translation as a communicative process in which purpose has been given the major emphasis. On the other hand, the “Relevance Theory” provided by Sperber and Wilson¹⁰ argues that there is no need for a distinct general theory of translation because translation can be naturally accounted for under the general aspect of human communication.

However, these two theories aforementioned that stem from linguistic paradigms do not concern literary translations. To determine the functions and describe literary equivalents is difficult because the meaning of these texts stem not only from their denotative meaning, but especially from their connotative meaning.
Douglas Robinson in his book *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* states:

> We are currently in the middle of a translation studies boom: all around the world new programs are springing up, some aimed at the professional training of translators and interpreters, others at the academic study of translation and interpreting, most at both.\(^{11}\)

**James Holmes’ Map of Translation Studies**

James Holmes’ famous book *‘The Name and Nature of Translation Studies’* is considered as a major step in the scholarly study of translation. This book provides a theoretical system that both recognises and unifies many aspects of translation studies. It predicts an entire future discipline and effectively encourage work aimed at establishing that discipline. This book was a major stepward because it attacked the unclear but ‘self assured’ categories that used to judge translations for so long a time. Holmes grouped and mapped scientifically, and arranged his topics hierarchically. ‘Applied’ was opposed to ‘Pure’, the latter divided into ‘Theoretical’ and ‘Descriptive’, then ‘Descriptive’ was broken down in turn into ‘Product Oriented’, ‘Process Oriented’ and ‘Function Oriented’, and so on.
Figure 1 shows the graphic form these categories received later from Gideon Toury. Of course, translation studies cannot be reduced to this one map, and the map itself has been evolving dynamically, along with the fields it claims to represent.

**Figure 1: Holmes’ Map of Translation Studies**
**Figure 2**: Toury's map of the relation between translation studies and its applied extensions.

Pure Translation Studies

Pure Translation Studies is classified into Descriptive Translation Studies and Theoretical Translation Studies. The aim of Descriptive Translation Studies is ‘to describe the observable facts of translating and translation(s) as
they manifest themselves in the world of our experience’, where for translating we mean the process that underlies the creation of the final product of translation. The objective of the Theory of Translation Studies is ‘to establish general principles by means of which these phenomena can be explained and predicted’.

There are three main types of research within Descriptive Translation Studies: product-oriented, process-oriented and function-oriented. The focus of product-oriented descriptive translation studies is the description of individual translations. Process-oriented descriptive translation studies aims at revealing the thought processes that take place in the mind of the translator while she or he is translating. Function-oriented descriptive translation studies include research which describes the function or impact that a translation or a collection of translations has had in the socio-cultural situation of the target language.

Theoretical Translation Studies often uses the empirical findings produced by Descriptive Translation Studies. It elaborates principles, theories and models to explain and predict what the process of translation is, given certain conditions such as a particular pair of languages or a particular pair of texts.
Theoretical Translation Studies hold both a General Translation Theory and
Partial Translation Theories. Holmes established the final aim of the
discipline as the elaboration of a general theory capable of explaining and
predicting all phenomena regarding translating and translation. However, as
he recognized, most theories that had been elaborated until that time were
models limited to one or more aspects of translation. The formulation of a
general theory is a long-term goal for the discipline as a whole.

Holmes distinguishes six different types of Partial Translation Theory:
medium restricted (theories of human versus computer assisted translation
or written versus oral translation), area-restricted (theories relating to
specific language communities), rank-restricted (theories dealing with
language as a rank or level system), text-type restricted (theories relating to
particular text categories such as poems, technical manuals, etc.), time-
restricted (theories dealing with contemporary texts or those from an older
period), and problem restricted (for example theories concerning the
translation of puns, titles, idioms, proper names, metaphors, etc.).

**Applied Translation Studies**
Applied Translation Studies, the second main branch of the discipline, is concerned with the following issues:

1- Translator training.
2- The preparation of translation tools, such as dictionaries, grammars, term banks.
3- Translation criticism which concerns itself with the development of criteria for the evaluation of the quality or effectiveness of the translation product.
4- The establishment of translation policy (which involves giving advice on the role of the translator in a given socio-cultural context, deciding on the economic position of the translator, or deciding on which texts need to be translated, or deciding on the role that translation should play in the teaching of foreign languages)

Jeremy Munday developed the 'Applied' part of translation studies in view of the emerging interdisciplinary fields of study as follows:

Figure 3.14
Approaching translation within a target-oriented framework

Polysystem Theory

In the 1970s, Polysystem Theory was introduced as a reaction to the static prescriptive models. Itmar Even-Zohar produced a synthesis of “structuralism,” “Russian formalism,” the “Communication theory,” and semiotics to create the “Polysystem theory”, of literature and culture. Polysystem Theory, which deals with all cultural, linguistic, literary, and social phenomena, does not consider translations as single texts, but regards them as a system functioning within a polysystem governed by the literary system in which translations are done. Polysystem theory developed new aspects in Descriptive Translation Studies that attracted many scholars in the last twenty years.
As a consequence, one hardly gets any idea whatsoever of the function of translated literature for a literature as a whole or of its position within that literature. Moreover, there is no awareness of the possible existence of translated literature as a particular literary system. The prevailing concept is rather that of “translation” or “translated works” treated on individual grounds.¹⁶

Even-Zohar claims that translated literature works as a system¹⁷:

1- In the way the Target Language selects works for translation.
2- In the way translation norms, behavior and policies are influenced by other co-systems.

The polysystem is conceived as a heterogeneous, hierarchized conglomerate (or system) of systems which interact to bring about an ongoing dynamic process of evolution within the polysystem as a whole.¹⁸

The hierarchy, according to Even-Zohar, is “the means by which translations were chosen, and the way they functioned within the literary system”¹⁹. If the highest position is occupied by an innovative literary type, then the lower levels are likely to be occupied by growing conservative types. And if the
conservative forms are at the top, innovation and renewal are expected to come from the lower levels; if not, a phase of stagnation takes place.

This dynamic method of evolution is essential to the polysystem, demonstrating that the relations between innovatory and conservative systems are in a steady status of instability and competition. Because of this instability, the position of translated literature is not permanent in the Polysystem. It may take up a primary or a secondary position in the Polysystem. If it is primary, it contributes dynamically in shaping the center of the Polysystem. Leading writers frequently produce the most important translations and translations are essential in the formation of new models for the target culture, e.g., introducing new poetics, techniques, etc.

Even-Zohar classifies three social circumstances in which translation may preserve a primary position:

(1) When a literature is at its developing stage
(2) When a literature is marginal or feeble or both
(3) When a literature contains a vacuum or finds itself in a state of crisis or at a turning point.

Even-zohar argues:
Translated literature fulfills the needs of a young literature to put its renewed tongue in use in as many literary genres as possible in order to make it functional as a literary language and useful for its emerging public. Since, when it is young and in the process of being established, a young literature cannot create major texts in all genres until its polysystem has crystallized, it greatly benefits from the experience of other literatures, and translated literature becomes, in a way, one of its most important systems.\(^{21}\)

If translated literary work presumes a secondary position, then it provides a minor system within the polysystem. It has no major influence over the central system and even becomes a conservative element, maintaining conventional forms and conforming to the literary norms of the target system. Even-Zohar points out that this secondary position is the normal one for translated literatures. It is, of course, worth mentioning that some translated literature may be secondary while others, translated from major source literatures, are primary.

Even-Zohar believes that the position taken by translated literature in the polysystem originates the translation strategy. If the position is primary, translators do not feel forced to follow target literature models and are more
prepared to break conventions, thus, they often create a Target Text that is close to the Source Text in terms of adequacy, reproducing the textual relations of the ST. This, Even-Zohar says, may then lead to new SL models. And if translated literature is secondary, translators are likely to use in hand target-culture models for the TT and produce more non-adequate translations.

**Toury’s Descriptive Translation Studies**

Translation Studies was extremely Source-Oriented in the 1970s. Translators were primarily concerned with the source text and with the safeguard of its legal rights. Target constraints became supplementary unless they fell within the range of linguistics.

Gideon Toury, a translation scholar and theoretician, planned the Target Oriented Approach based on Polysystem Theory. This approach is an exclusive and comprehensive theory of translation that is also a reaction to normative, synchronic, and Source-System Oriented theoretical frameworks.

In his book *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, he says that he wants to put together a general theory applicable to all translational phenomena:
It (the book) consists of a series of papers representing a suggestion of steps in their author’s search for such a theory, a search underlined by one main object: to enable himself, and if possible, other students of translational phenomena - be they entire texts or their constituents, corpora bigger than one text, or, finally, phenomena which have no direct textual realization – to account for them in a systematic way, within one unified framework.

The Target Oriented Approach criticizes major principles of Source-Oriented Theories, and replaces them with new ones. First of all, traditional Source Oriented Theories define two levels in Translation Studies: theory and process. The Target Oriented Approach criticizes this and claims that theories developed by Source-Oriented Theories do not suit translation realities because they are abstract, prescriptive norms that do not stem from actual translation processes:

... it appears not only as naive, but also as misleading and infertile for translation studies to start from the assumption that translation is nothing but an attempt to reconstruct the original, or certain parts or aspect thereof, or the preservation of certain predetermined features of the original, which are (or are to be) unconditionally considered the invariant under
transformation, in another sign-system, as it is usually defined from the source’s point of view.\textsuperscript{23}

(...) Most of the theories of translation hitherto formulated tend to be prescriptive, and thus are in no position to serve as a point of departure for research. Therefore I here posit the need for a revision of the theory in keeping with the needs of the translation scholar, namely a revision which will lend it a greater descriptive and explanatory force.\textsuperscript{24}

(...) This paper wishes to argue that source-oriented theories—while able to serve as a basis for translators’ training and other applied activities are totally unable to supply a sound starting point and framework for a descriptive study of actual translations, especially literary\textsuperscript{25}

(...)Thus, an ST-oriented theory is inadequate, or at least insufficient, as a basis for a descriptive study of translations relationships as empirical phenomena.\textsuperscript{26}

Hence, the Target Oriented Approach argues that Translation Studies is an “empirical discipline” since its objects of study are facts of real life:

Since the object - level of translation studies consists of actual facts of ‘real life’ - whether they be actual texts, intertextual relationships, or models and norms of behavior - rather than the merely speculative outcome of preconceived theoretical
hypotheses and models, it is undoubtedly, in essence, an empirical science.\textsuperscript{27}

After about two decades, target text attracted lots of attention among scholars. Toury’s idea that a translation is a text that is accepted in the target culture as being a translation was revolutionary. The notion carries several important implications. First, as Toury argues that translations are facts of the culture which hosts them, with the assumption that whatever their function and identity, these are constituted within that same culture and reflect its own constellation. A translation is a translation in the target culture, not the source culture. And so the position and function of a translated text, is determined by considerations initiating in the culture which hosts them\textsuperscript{28}.

By focusing on the role of target factors in a translation, whether retrospectively or prospectively, one will discover that he or she is opting for the target-oriented approach, even though, in the course of application one will return to the source text. It is a matter of orientation.

Then “Descriptive Translation Studies” was added to the skeleton of Translation Studies, a branch that is necessary for every empirical discipline:
No empirical science can make a claim for completeness and (relative) autonomy unless it has developed a descriptive branch.29

Descriptive branch of the discipline was developed to replace isolated free-standing studies:

What we need, however, is not isolated attempts reflecting excellent intuitions and supplying fine insights (which many of the existing studies certainly provide) but a systematic scientific branch, seen as an inherent component of an overall discipline of translation studies, based on clear assumptions and armed with a methodology and research techniques made as explicit as possible. Only a branch of this sort can assure that the findings of individual case studies carried out within its framework will be both relevant and intersubjectively testable, and the studies themselves repeatable.30

As it is evident in Figure 2, Toury believes that the three branches of “theoretical,” “descriptive,” and “applied” Translation Studies interact with each other. These three branches deal with possible, existing, and required relationships respectively:
Table 1. The differences between Translation Theory, DTS, and the applied extensions of the discipline as exemplified by the use of verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Relationship</th>
<th>Criterion (or Type of Condition)</th>
<th>Typical Verbs</th>
<th>Branch of Translation Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>Theoretical conditional</td>
<td>Can be</td>
<td>Translation theory, basic translation theory, modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probable</td>
<td>Is likely to be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>existing</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>DTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>required</td>
<td>Postulated</td>
<td>Should be</td>
<td>Applied extensions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this framework, translation theories consist of consistent hypotheses that are developed in the light of findings of Descriptive Translation Studies. Toury, asserts that Descriptive Translation Studies is at the heart of the discipline. It has a distinctive internal organization; it interacts with translation theory and has a unidirectional relationship with applied extensions. He considers for Descriptive Translation Studies a major role in the development of the whole discipline as an independent field of study:
(...) one of the aims of Translation Studies should definitely be to bring the results of descriptive-explanatory studies executed within DTS to bear on the theoretical branch.\textsuperscript{32}

(...) descriptive studies are actually the best means of testing, refuting, and especially modifying and amending the underlying theory, on the basis of which they are executed.\textsuperscript{33}

(...) One of their (of descriptive studies) aims is always to put to test the hypotheses and models supplied by the theory, in whose framework the studies are carried out. There is simply no other way of verifying, refuting, and especially amending these hypotheses, and without a constant testing of this sort the theory is bound to lose contact with the empirical phenomena, or to lead to stagnation (...).\textsuperscript{34}

Applied Translation Studies, on the other hand, in accordance with the results of Descriptive Translation Studies and accordingly with the theoretical branch is a prescriptive branch:

Obviously, descriptive-explanatory investigations can be rewarding in the attempt to draw the applied extensions of Translation Studies close to real-life behavior, thus mitigating whatever pretentiousness they are liable to display (...).\textsuperscript{35}
They (Applied Translation Studies) are not intended to account either for possibilities and likelihoods or for facts of actual behavior, but rather set norms in a more or less conscious way. In brief, to tell others what they should have done/ or should be doing, if they accept these norms and submit to them.\textsuperscript{36}

According to Toury, translations primarily occupy a position in the social and literary systems of the target culture, and this position verifies the translation strategies that are used. He proposes the following three-phase methodology for systematic DTS\textsuperscript{37}:

1- Situate the text within the target culture system, looking at its significance or acceptability.
2- Compare the ST and the TT for shifts, identifying relationships between coupled pairs of ST and TT segments, and attempting generalizations about the underlying concept of translation.
3- Draw implications for decision-making in future translating.

There are three main types of research within Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS): Product-Oriented, Process-Oriented and Function-Oriented. The focus of Product-Oriented descriptive translation studies is the description of individual translations. Toury gives Function a primary role
over Product and process. Holmes, however, saw Function, Product and Process as having the same importance.

A comparative analysis of different translations in the same target language of one source text, or of a source text and its translation into one or more languages might be limited to works of one historical era, in which case they are known as synchronic studies, or they might be extended to different periods, in which case they are called diachronic studies.

The Descriptive Translation Studies focus on translations themselves rather than on the translation process. Process-Oriented descriptive translation studies aims at revealing the thought processes that take place in the mind of the translator while she or he is translating.

(...) any research into translation should start with observational facts, i.e. the translated utterances themselves (and their constitutive elements, on various levels), proceeding from there towards the reconstruction of nonobservational facts, and not the other way around.\textsuperscript{38}
The reason, according to Toury, is the simple fact that it is really complicated to examine the human mind, while one can easily examine its products, that is, the translations.

Function-oriented descriptive translation studies include research which clarifies the function or impact that a translation or a collection of translations has had in the socio-cultural situation of the target language. It is thus ‘a study of contexts rather than texts’. Within this field of research one may, for example, study the reasons why certain types of texts were translated in a certain country in a particular period of time (synchronic) or during a longer stretch of time (diachronic) while others were excluded.

Considering Function, Process, and Product - Oriented Approaches as justifiable and autonomous fields of study would surly makes any study in these fields more wealthy and to the point. According to Toury, Functions, Processes and Products are not just ‘related’, but rather, from one complex whole whose constitutive parts are hardly separable from one another for purposes other than methodical. Therefore, regardless of the approach of translation studies one selects, at institutional level, the program must pay
due attention to the interdependence of the three aspects in order to gain true insight into the particulars of the translation phenomenon.

When the translations are examined based on the framework of Descriptive Translation Studies, the source text is just one principle to be taken into consideration and the real importance is given to the translations themselves that, according to the target system, are not projections of the source text, but in fact the only reality.

Finally, apart from the “synchronic,” a “diachronic analysis” of the translations is desirable because this can give a wider perspective to the study, which can then be more comprehensive in its findings and conclusions:

One of the tasks of this branch (DTS) of translation studies will be to account for the relationships actually obtaining between a body of translated items serving as its corpus (be it a single text, the total variety of solutions to a certain, well, defined translational problem, the entire production of a certain translator, school of translators, period). 39

It will be argued that this approach, (…), is more adequate from the point of view of the requirements of descriptive,
historically-oriented translation studies, and likely to correct many of the flaws inherent in the existing, mostly prescriptive and a-historical approaches to the problem.\textsuperscript{40}

**Translational Norms**

According to the Target Oriented Approach, synchronic or diachronic Descriptive Translation Studies reveal “translation norms,” which establish the type of correspondence between source and target texts, to understand translation process:

(...) norms are the key-concept and focal point in any scientific approach to the study and description of social phenomena, especially behavioral activities (...).\textsuperscript{41}

Norms are operative at every stage in translating process and at every level in its products, the translation itself.\textsuperscript{42}

He believes that the translation norms should be the focal concept in any study of literary translation and the main object of the study.

As strictly translational norms can only be applied at the receiving end, establishing them is not merely justified by a target-oriented approach but should be seen as its very epitome.\textsuperscript{43}
Translation norms are not static facts valid forever, but rather they are dynamic:

But they (norms) are by no means fixed and given. On the contrary, the establishment of the exact relationships is an essential part (...) of the overall study of translational norms.44

Norms are also unstable, changing entities because of their very nature. At times, norms change rather quickly; at other times, they are more enduring, and the process may take longer.45

The Target Oriented Approach defines three types of norms: “initial norms,” “preliminary” and “operational”

The “initial norms” categorize the individual translator’s choice to conform either to the original text with its textual relations and norms or to the target culture’s linguistic and literary norms, or some combination thereof.

So, rather than fidelity or lack of fidelity to the source text, translation equivalence can be seen as "adequacy" or "acceptability." In the former the translator will move closer to the source text system, but in the latter to the target system:
If (...), the translation tends to adhere to the norms of the original work, and through them - as well- to the norms of SL and/or the source literary polysystem as a whole. This tendency, which we shall call the pursuit of an adequate translation, may mean - or cause - incompatibility of the translated text with the target linguistic and/or literary norms.\textsuperscript{46}

Two larger groups of norms related to translation are preliminary vs. operational.

Preliminary norms are concerned with the two main sets of considerations that are interrelated: those considerations regarding the existence and actual nature of an exact translation policy on the one hand and those concerning the directness of the translation on the other. Translation policy, according to Toury, refers to “those factors that govern the choice of text-types, or even of individual texts, to be imported through translation into a particular culture/language at a particular point in time”\textsuperscript{47}.

Operational norms, according to Toury, “may be described as serving as a model, in accordance with which translations come into being, whether involving the norms realized by the source text plus certain modifications, or purely target norms, or a particular compromise between the two.”\textsuperscript{48}
And lastly, as Bengi argues, the Target Oriented Approach suggests a
descriptive, diachronic (including synchronic aspects) target (including
source) system-oriented theoretical framework focused on the product
rather than a normative, synchronic source system oriented theoretical
framework focused on the process of the Source-Oriented Theories.\textsuperscript{49}

Notes.
3. Ibid. p. 54
4. Ibid, p. 54-55
5. Ibid, p. 63
6. Ibid, p. 69
7. Ibid, p. 70
15. Literary polysystem includes all sorts of literary and semi-literary texts as an aggregate of systems” (Even-Zohar, 1978, P. 119)
18. Ibid.
19. Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Studies*, 1993, p. 120
20. Ibid, p.117
21. Ibid.
23. Ibid, p.17
24. Ibid, p. 62
25. Ibid, p. 35
26. Ibid, p. 40
30. Ibid. p. 17-18
32. Ibid, p. 15
35. Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*,1995, p. 281
36. Ibid. p. 19
40. Ibid. p. 63
41. Ibid, p. 52
42. Ibid, p. 53
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid, p. 54
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid, p. 55
47. Gideon Toury. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, 1995, p. 58
48. Ibid, p. 60
49. Critical Reflections and Suggestions as to ‘a Comprehensive Approach’ in Translation Studies, 1992