

**Pym, Anthony. *Exploring Translation Theories*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009 (pp 190). ISBN 978-0-415-55363-6.**

In addition to Lawrence Venuti's *Translation Studies Reader* and Jeremy Munday's *Introducing Translation Studies*, Anthony Pym presents us with a new text book for translation theory classes. As he states in the preface, the book is designed for academic purposes. However, the accessibility of language and the lay-out makes it an equally easy read for anyone interested in learning about reflection on translation. Apart from the introductory chapter titled "What is translation theory?", the chapters focus on paradigms in a chronological order, namely, on equivalence, purposes, descriptions, uncertainty, localisation and cultural translation. In addition to the presentation and discussion on the main theories of the paradigm under focus, each chapter includes sub-sections on the main points covered, virtues of and counter-arguments posed to the paradigm, and a summary, all of which ease the reading-process visually and mentally. The suggested projects and activities at the end of every chapter could be very useful classroom activities to engage the students with. One of the challenges of teaching translation theory is to render it relevant for the students, who have until then conceptualised it in complete isolation from the practice of translating. The up-to-date, engaging questions and small research projects provided in this section address that challenge quite effectively and encourage students (or in general, the reader) to think about translation theory actively in relation to practice, beyond the written word. The related website<sup>1</sup> could also offer useful material.

In this volume, Pym's focus is on Western translation theories that have emerged since the 1960s. In Chapters 2 and 3, he discusses the controversial concept of equivalence, which, Pym states and I agree, we cannot and should not do away with so easily in the study and practice of translation. In this section, Pym also introduces a novelty in the thinking on translation, namely two ways of conceptualizing equivalence (he calls these "sub-paradigms"), as "natural" and "directional". He warns that these terms are not used by the theories themselves; they derive from his meta-perspective to these theories, and as such "help us to make some sense of a confusing terrain" (30).

Chapter 2 presents the theories whose concept of equivalence can be classified under "natural equivalence", which Pym defines as equivalence that exists "*prior to the act of translation*" (6). Therefore, in any couplet provided, it is possible to go from language A to B and back from B to A without disturbing the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://usuaris.tinet.cat/apym/publications/ETT/index.html>. Accessed April 2011.

equivalence. For Pym, this sub-paradigm was a response to structuralism, which argued translation that was impossible since every language was considered inherently different from another. “Natural equivalence”, on the other hand, claims the opposite and assumes that languages can express a reality that exists outside language in ways that are equal to each other in terms of value (a term broader in meaning for Pym than Saussure’s value<sup>2</sup>), hence the term “natural equivalence”. Pym also states that this kind of equivalence “will be opposed to” (6) “directional equivalence”, where the equivalence is unidirectional, in other words, one can go from language A to B, but not vice versa, and which Pym will take up in the following chapter. The concept of natural equivalence indeed helps us understand better, for example, Vinay and Darbelnet’s concept of equivalence, especially with the example of “lentement” in French and “slow” in English being natural equivalents of each other basically because they would be used to express the same situation, if no one were translating (12).

However, as we read on, we learn that things do not work so smoothly. We see that “compensation”, one of the “stylistic procedures” that Vinay and Darbelnet list, is presented separately because “it can be used in a particularly *directional* way” (15, emphasis added). Here, in the chapter on natural equivalence, Pym introduces the notion of directional equivalence before the chapter devoted to it. This is where confusion starts for the reader, and we begin to think maybe these two notions are not so much in opposition after all. As we continue, we see that Werner Koller’s frames of equivalence are included under natural equivalence. Pym explains why: “Although Koller allows that translators actively *produce* equivalence in the sense that equivalents need not exist prior to the translation, the implicit role that he allows to the source text should be enough to bring his approach under the umbrella of ‘natural equivalence’” (18). In other words, we learn that the criterion in the very definition of natural equivalence (equivalence existing before the act of translation) might be overlooked in some cases, but another criterion, which is introduced here (i.e. the dominant role that Koller allows the ST to play), weighs more in listing Koller’s frames under natural equivalence.

Pym uses the same argument to include Katharina Reiss’ text types under natural equivalence, because “the decisive factor is held to be none other than the *nature* of the source text” (18, emphasis added). We are confused because “the nature of the source text” is quite a different idea from the initial one that natural equivalence was based on, that is simply the assumption that languages are capable of expressing the same thing. The criterion Pym applies to Koller’s frames raises yet another question: what happened to bi-directionality?

Unfortunately, in Chapter 3 things do not seem to get better in this respect. The first sentence tells us that the theories here “are based on equivalence but do

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<sup>2</sup> For Pym, equivalence (equal value) can be achieved at the level of form, reference or function (8), whereas for Saussure, two words, “sheep” and “mouton” for example, might have the same signification but not the same value because their content in relation to other words in their respective languages is different (84).

*not* assume that the relation is natural or reciprocal” (25). Two pages later, the same quotation from Nida and Taber, that Pym referred to in order to clarify the meaning of “natural” in the chapter on natural equivalence (9), is used this time to show us that “the mode of thought” it presents “seems to be both natural and directional at the same time” (27). Then, we learn both sub-paradigms are often “blended” and “when Vinay and Darbelnet present their list of strategies, the mode of thought goes from directional at one end to naturalness at the other” (28). What Pym means here is that Vinay and Darbelnet’s list of seven procedures (loan, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, correspondence and adaptation) demonstrates a mode of thought that combines natural and directional equivalence, an explanation which I think comes a bit too late.

At this stage, things become difficult for readers who do not forget what they have read and for whom precision matters. Meanwhile, instead of benefiting from these two notions of equivalence to find our way in a confusing terrain as Pym promises, we readers are trying to understand what criteria apply to each, and which theory is under which category for what reason. More often than not, Pym discusses both concepts in both chapters because of their “blended” nature (p. 28). Theories of equivalence are already laden with concepts of polarity difficult to map on each other and trace; natural and directional equivalence seem to add one more to those, rather than being heuristic devices. Consider, for example, the following excerpt about Cicero’s literal and free translation which Pym deals with – together with other equivalence theories that put forward a polarity – in the chapter on directional equivalence:

Note that the distinction [between literal and free translation] need not map on to any profound difference between natural and directional equivalence. If anything, the freer translation is the one most likely to be the most “natural” in the target language, whereas the most literal translation is the one most likely to give reciprocal directionality – but there is no guarantee. (31)

I believe the problem mostly derives not from the notions that Pym introduces, but from the isolated way of presenting them initially in two different chapters and defining them first as oppositional. Instead, Pym could have presented the theories on equivalence in their chronological order in a single chapter only, without, at the same time, giving up on these concepts or forcing so much already existing theories under either of the titles.

Chapter 4 deals with translation theories that have developed in opposition to a certain aspect of the equivalence paradigm. These theories, which Pym gathers under the title “Purposes”, focus on function, rather than the linguistic features of the ST. Pym explains very well that, at its initial stages, functionalism was not so different from the equivalence paradigm simply because it still maintained that the ST was the main factor in determining the function of the TT (this is the case for the theories of Katharina Reiss, Werner Koller and even Christiana Nord). He

also correctly argues that functionalism as an idea is not completely new and can be traced to Nida and even Cicero. For Pym, what changed radically the paradigm of functionalism was Vermeer's Skopos theory, which supports that the functions of the ST and the TT need not be the same. This leads to the "dethronement" of the ST and its replacement by the concept of Skopos. Despite striking one as a little extreme, Pym's example of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* here does get the idea of "dethronement" across. It also demonstrates perfectly how the linguistic idea of equivalence cannot really help us in certain situations where social, ethical and communicative factors should be taken into account. As the paradigm of functionalism is not only limited to the Skopos theory, Pym also discusses Justa Holz-Mänttari, Hans Hönl, Paul Kussmaul and Mary Snell-Hornby's contributions to the paradigm.

The following chapter is "Descriptions". An asset of Pym's work in general is that he discusses each paradigm in relation to its predecessor and successor, so the reader is never lost and can follow with ease how ideas, theories and paradigms evolve into and differ from each other in translation studies. Chapter 5, therefore, aptly opens with a subsection titled "What happened to Equivalence?", which foregrounds one of the paradigm-shifting ideas of Descriptive Translation Studies developed by Gideon Toury, which is that "equivalence was a feature of all translations" (64). Pym discusses this idea further separately under the title "'Assumed' Translations" (76), where he includes in his discussion contributions by other theoretists such as Pym, Hermans and Chesterman, to the issue of defining what a translation is/can be. Other topics taken up in this chapter are translation shifts, systems/polysystems, norms, universals of translation, and laws. The "Frequently Had Arguments" section in this chapter ends with a weakness of this paradigm (i.e. the issue of subjectivity on the part of the person who describes), which would be more efficiently taken up by what Pym calls "theories of uncertainty" (85), the subject of the next chapter.

In Chapter 6, titled "Uncertainty", Pym is aware that the theories that he will be discussing might be challenging for the reader, so he begins from the very basics that ease the transition, instead of presenting head-on Derrida's deconstruction, for example. The title of the first section is again a to-the-point question: "Why uncertainty?". Here Pym places the advent of uncertainty in translation studies in a historical context, based on two factors mainly: the instability of the source text and epistemological skepticism experienced in the humanities since the 1970s (91). Some key terms explained here include determinism, which, when applied to translation studies, Pym defines as the belief that "a translation is caused ('determined') by what is in the source text" (92), and indeterminism, which argues that "none of the translations can be wholly 'determined' by that source text", that "translation does not involve a transfer of ideas, intentions, meanings or words" and the translator has some free will (92).

Next, Pym discusses the American philosopher Willard Van Orin Quine's "jungle linguist" experiment, in which a linguist arrives in a village where the inhabitants speak a different language. When a rabbit runs past and the villagers

shout “gavagai,” the linguist writes down that “gavagai” means rabbit. However, for Quine, we can never be certain of this equivalence and other interpretations are always possible. Pym refers to this case as “translation” without warning the reader that here it is actually close to “interpretation”. The kind of translation here is used in a much broader sense than, say, the concept of translation in Skopos theory discussed earlier: the “translator” in the example is the linguist who does *not* know the language he is “translating”. This is hardly a situation where translators envisaged by the descriptive or functionalist paradigm usually find themselves in. Pym does not warn about the possible confusion of translation with interpretation and he does not acknowledge the difference. This lack of precision would not be a problem (since interpretation and translation *are* closely related and in certain cases could replace each other) if the book at hand were not on translation theory and if Pym did not use this example to argue that “as far as translation is concerned, however, the message seems to be that indeterminacy will never go away”. As we pass from the jungle linguist’s translation to the term “translation” used in this argument, we must adjust our concept of translation. Although I think it is based on the wrong example, we do get the idea: “different translations will produce different translations” (94).

Pym argues that the binary indeterminism/determinism can also apply to communication in general. The former argues that it is impossible to assume a meaning that can be coded and decoded, “we cannot be sure of communicating anything” (95); the latter assumes that meaning transfer does take place; hence it is possible to talk about equivalence. This is in line with his initial definitions of these key terms and it is useful. In the next section, referring to Plato’s dialogue *Cratylus*, Pym discusses two oppositional views concerning language: whether the relationship between words and their referents is arbitrary (indeterminist view of language), or is determined by the referents themselves (determinist view of language). Then he demonstrates that “many determinist theories of language become indeterminist when applied to translation” (96) and vice versa (“an indeterminist theory of naming can produce an equivalence-based theory of translation”, 97). The interconnectedness of translation and language cannot be denied, and theories on language can definitely help us think about translation, but here it seemed to me as if Pym was pushing a bit too far to apply views of language to theories of translation in order to come up with a paradox. Although it may be a good mental exercise and definitely sounds neat, it is difficult to see how the “paradox” that Pym presents here is useful in explaining translation theories. Perhaps it is better to think of views of language and those of translation separately and not assume that the relationship between the “signified” and the “signifier” corresponds perfectly to that between the ST and the TT. If these two couplets are considered separately, the transition from the indeterminist view of language to determinist translation, and vice versa, might not look as a paradox. I think that different concepts of indeterminism/determinism are at work in language and in translation; this is so at least in the empirical sense. Besides, Pym is carefully sidestepping Saussure at this point, who he refers to in passing in this section. Saussure’s structuralism ar-

gues that the relationship is arbitrary (indeterminist view of language), but at the same time, as Pym in the first chapter mentions, supports the idea that full equivalence is not possible (indeterminist view of translation) (Saussure 1998: 79-85). But of course, this might not be as interesting, for there is no paradox here.

After discussing Heidegger and Benjamin, Pym goes on to explore theories of how to live with uncertainty. Theories of consensus, hermeneutics, constructivism, game theory, and theories of semiosis are all discussed here. It is striking to see that Pym's epistemological skepticism, which he designates as a key term for the chapter, extends only to "teachers, dictionaries, experts, translators" (93), but not to religion as effectively. He does refer to the translation of the Septuagint in exactly the same way by 72 translators as a "legend" (102), but then he asks and answers: "How was it possible for them to overcome linguistic indeterminacy so miraculously? Presumably because they were not just any old translators: they were rabbis, with faith, and divine spirit thus oriented their words" (102). Assigning meaning to an unchanging, fixed source, an entity outside humanity is indeed a prevalent way of living with uncertainty for all humanity, not only for people of the Judeo-Christian faith.

Chapter 7 introduces "localisation", a subject one does not expect to see in a book on translation theory. However, Pym presents really valid reasons to include it in his work. It might, for example, pose certain implications for translation theory. One of them is the concept of "internationalisation", which might challenge the traditional concept of translation as moving from a source to a target text. The internationalised version in localisation is "a general intermediary version" (123), from which specific elements of the culture it was produced in are cleared. The use of the internationalised version renders the actual translation process more cost- and -time-efficient. Localisation is also the area of work in translation where we observe that technology profoundly changes the way we translate, and equivalence at the level of sentence, phrase and function, makes a comeback. In this sense, the emergence of the internationalised version, Pym argues, resulted in us entering "an age of artificially produced equivalence" (133). Food for thought, indeed. As Pym also argues, in the case of popular romance novels, the terms of localisation can also be useful in thinking about (globalised) literary translation, proving his inclusion of this particular chapter in the volume worthwhile. In translation between two minority<sup>3</sup> languages, we can observe that the English translation can function like the internationalized version in localisation. This is, for example, the case for the Turkish author Serdar Özkan's *Kayıp Gül* [The Missing Rose], which, according to the author's website, has so far been translated into "43 languages in more than 50 countries worldwide".<sup>4</sup> The novel

<sup>3</sup> I am using the term minority here as a "dynamic and never static" one, in the sense designated by Michael Cronin (2009: 170). Therefore, it does not describe an essential quality of the language, but expresses a relation to other languages. It simply means Greek and Turkish are "less-translated language[s]" (Branchadell in Cronin 2009: 170), compared to, say, English.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.serदारozkan.com/index.html>. Accessed April 2011.

was first published in Turkish in 2003.<sup>5</sup> The English translation came out in publication after seven years in 2010.<sup>6</sup> However, in the meantime, it functioned as intermediary for translation into many other minority languages, including one of the Indian languages, Telugu. The Greek translation, *To Χαμένο Πόδο*, published by Livanis in 2006, is also from English. However, localisation might also entail a reduction of translation, as it sees it is only a part of the whole localisation process. In this respect, Pym rightly emphasises “the need to train translators in the broad range of tasks that make up the localisation process” (136).

Chapter 8, titled “Cultural Translation”, focuses on the use of the term “translation” in situations where bilingual language transfer does not necessarily take place: “Instead, translation is seen as a general activity of communication between cultural groups” (144). The first section is dedicated to explaining Homi Bhabha’s theory with its focus on hybridity, and material movement of people. Then Pym demonstrates how certain aspects of cultural translation can actually be found in theories of Roman Jakobson, Even-Zohar and Pym. Ethnography as translation and translation sociology also find their way into this chapter. In addition, Pym discusses Spivak’s ideas, but not in relation to feminism and the translation of Third World texts, but to psychoanalysis with reference to her article titled “Translation as Culture” (Spivak 2007).

Pym ends his work by calling on the readers to write their own theory, since no single theory explained in the book is superior to others, and each has its strengths and weaknesses. The variety of theories handled in this volume is indeed quite large, yet it seemed to me it could use a bit more of feminist and post-colonial translation theories. I could not help thinking these two important ways of approaching translation which take into account power struggles between the oppressed and the oppressor are missing from this volume. But as Pym warns in his Preface, he leaves them to companion volumes. Meanwhile, *Explaining Translation Theories*, as every book by Pym, is not a work we can remain indifferent to and, despite the questions it raises at times, presents very useful insights into translation theories without being boring at all.

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