Temporality

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The historian in fact never departs from historical time. Time sticks to his thought like soil to the gardener's spade. Of course he may dream of escaping it.
(Braudel [1958] 2009, 197–8)

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1. Premise

In the context of this volume I have interpreted temporality as meaning temporality in historical reconstruction and narrative, and not temporality in the philosophical sense. I have also worked on the premise that translation history is no different to any other history, except, perhaps, in the importance that it attributes to language (cf. Rundle and Rafael 2016, 28; Cohen 2016, 903–4 & n.22); and certainly not in terms of its relationship to temporality. This means that we face the same problems and the same theoretical issues as other historians and that there is much we can learn from discussions that have already taken place in history 'proper'. This will be reflected in what follows.

2. Timescale

2.1 The longue durée and multiple temporalities

The temporality of our lives is commonly theorised in terms of three different timescales: (i) the short-term scale of our everyday lives; (ii) the middle-range scale of our lifetimes and of the broader historical processes which we experience; and (iii) the long-term scale of changes that are too slow for us to be able to perceive them, sometimes described as environmental time (cf. Gross 1985, 53).

One of the most significant conceptualizations of historical temporality is that put forward by the Annales School and in particular by Fernand Braudel, who posited the "multiple and contradictory temporalities of human lives" (Braudel [1958] 2009, 173) and coined the term "*longue durée*". Braudel argued that historians should move away from *histoire événementielle*, the history of discrete events traced in a linear sequence of cause and effect, which he felt was the proper dimension of journalists

and chroniclers. Instead we should try to construct long-term history from which the underlying cycles of social and environmental change could be made to emerge (cf. Braudel [1949] 1972; Iggers 1997, 57).

The Annales group sought to identify long-term historical processes and stable structures and adopted an interdisciplinary approach that actively engaged with material and statistical research from other fields such as geography, anthropology and economics (cf. Bloch [1940] 1965; Braudel [1949] 1972): producing a history without "frontiers or compartments" (Burke 1992, x). And it was only by adopting a *longue durée* perspective that the significance of the data collected could be understood, as Braudel explains here in reference to the use of sociological data:

> I am delighted to see a map showing the distribution of the homes of the employees of a large firm. But if I don't have a map of their previous distribution, and if the time between the two surveys is not sufficiently great to allow one to see this as part of a large change, what is the question we are asking, without which the survey is a waste of time? (Braudel [1958] 2009, 186)

In other words, a long-term temporality also serves to provide an interpretative framework that gives meaning to research that is more focused on the short term (Braudel [1958] 2009, 176). According to this approach the long duration is the most important because it is the concept against which we judge and understand the other two temporalities we are aware of:

> A great deal of how one's own life is understood, or even how one's everyday experiences are apprehended, both leans on and subsists within what is acquired from the *longue durée* (Gross 1985, 54).

Another important aspect of Braudel's approach is the idea of multiple temporalities, whereby the long- and short-term can co-exist and combine. One of the ways in which we can describe long-term social processes is by means of quantitative and qualitative research that looks in detail at specific contexts and establishes sets of relations within them. These relations can be described statistically, in terms of models that can then be extended mathematically to describe a more long-term process. The concept of multiple temporalities is also significant because it implies that there is not a single unifying history, with its underlying idea of a linear and coherent sequence from the

past towards the present. Rather, there are multiple histories that coexist but do not necessarily coincide and with no ultimate teleological goal (cf. Bloch [1940] 1965; Braudel [1949] 1972).

The Annales historians adopted the *longue durée* and multiple temporalities so that they could describe the social and economic structures that are the basis of the lives of ordinary people. Their perspective shifted from a historiography focused on the grand narratives of nations and their leaders – what Iggers (1997, 7) vividly calls the "rapid pulse of political history" – which was necessarily focused on short-term events, to a more sociological historiography which was more quantitative, more economic, more structural and that looked more to the long-term. From this perspective, historical subjects are defined as much, if not more, by their context as by their actions and individual experiences:

> But, most of all, there has been a shift of traditional historiographical temporality. A day, a year might seem appropriate lengths of time for a political historian. Time was the sum of days. But if one wanted to measure a price curve, a demographic progression, wage trends, variations in interest rates, the study of production (more hoped for than achieved), a close analysis of trade, it required much longer measures of time. (Braudel [1958] 2009, 176)

Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995) is probably the best known example in translation history of the adoption of both a longue durée and multiple temporalities. Venuti draws on the experience of individual translators (including his own) and on evidence collected on individual translations and their reception to construct a long-term picture of the kind of cultural and aesthetic pressures that are at play in the Anglophone (principally US) book market – a picture that is at once both historical and sociological.

The success of Venuti's study, and the widespread diffusion within translation studies of some of its key concepts, is also typical of the way in which we first perceive and then assimilate *longue durée* processes that are, in theory, beyond the range of our personal experience. These are processes that remain unperceived until a historian has the necessary insight to bring them to light; but then, once they have been brought to light, we find continual confirmation of them and they become a part of our understanding of the present:

> By hypothesis, participants cannot perceive these sorts of [long-term] processes. Instead, they constitute a more hypothetical historical structure that may nonetheless play a future role in the narratives participants tell about themselves. A slow process of climate change may be imperceptible at a given point in time. But once it is identified and articulated by the analytical historian the construct may come into popular consciousness; what was previously invisible may become part of the furniture of the popular narrative. (Little 2010, 19)

2.2 Microhistory

Another well-known historiographical approach which is characterized by its choice of timescale is microhistory. The most influential proponents of this approach are the group of Italian historians lead by Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi who emerged in the late 1970s, centred around the journal *Quaderni storici*. Probably the most famous example of this method is Ginzburg's detailed microhistory of the life of the sixteenth century Italian miller, Menocchio, in his book *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980). There is also a German school of microhistory, known as *Alltagsgeschichte*, which developed in the 1980s at the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen (cf. Iggers 1997, 106–7 and p.114-17).

The Italian *microstoria* approach was conceived as an alternative both to Marxist macro perspectives on history and to what Ginzburg and his colleagues saw as the impersonal and dehumanized social history of the Annales school, whose wealth of statistical evidence gave little account of how people actually experienced their lives:

> Braudel's house of history, as Levi notes, has many rooms permitting a variety of outlooks and approaches but there are no people living in it. (Iggers 1997, 107)

The studies produced using this approach tend to adopt a short timescale, with a focus on small, relatively stable, communities, and often in the medieval period. Microhistory is generally considered to have been less successful in reconstructing life in modern, urban, environments that are subject to more rapid change (Iggers 1997, 113) and where, possibly, the life of the 'ordinary' individual is more difficult to observe within the context of a much larger and more heterogeneous population.

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In some ways, the macro approach of the Annales school and the micro approach of the Italian microhistorians shared a common objective. They wished to write the history of ordinary people and the societies or communities in which they lived. In both cases, this focus on ordinary people was intended as a reaction against earlier historiographical methods:

> that 'traditional history' that saw the 'so-called history of the world' dominated by protagonists who resembled orchestra directors. (Ginzburg 1993, 13)

But their respective choices of temporal perspective meant that they went about achieving their objectives in very different ways. The Annales school used the study of social structures and categories in order to deduce how ordinary people lived: reconstructing the contours of their lives, lives that did not leave behind many individual historical traces. Theirs was an approach that did not see a historical value in singular events but rather in events that could be placed in a series and therefore be considered representative. The microhistorians, on the other hand – relying on an anthropological approach and on finding suitable primary sources – used these sources to reconstruct the lives of a few individuals within a very small community, with a focus on their experience of events and social conditions. Furthermore, as Ginzburg stresses, "*The Cheese and the Worms* does not restrict itself to the reconstruction of an individual event; it narrates it" (Ginzburg 1993, 23). In this acknowledgment of the literary side to their endeavour, Ginzburg marks another important distinction between microhistory and the Annales approach, which sees history very much as a social science.

In its push to foreground the marginal and narrate the lives of those who live on the periphery, one might expect there to be a natural affinity between microhistory and the desire within translation studies to bring the translator out from behind the scenes. Jeremy Munday (2014) has explored the potential of a microhistory of translation based on the archival minutiae that translators have left in their wake; Sergia Adamo (2006) has discussed the application of microhistory to translation history; and Kathryn Batchelor and Sue-Ann Harding (Batchelor and Harding 2017) see affinities between their approach and microhistory in their study of translations of Frantz Fanon. But it is not a method that has been widely adopted, by which I mean with explicit reference to *microstoria*, possibly because of its anti-anachronistic stance

which would sit awkwardly with the kind of committed and activist stance that is present in much translation history; a point that Adamo (2006, 91) has raised in reference to Anthony Pym's *Negotiating the Frontier* (2000), and which also applies to Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995) and to the volume *Translation, Resistance, Activism* edited by Maria Tymoczko (2010) – to cite some influential examples of committed translation history (I shall return to the question of anachronism below).

On the other hand, a micro approach, in the sense of research with a short-term timescale and narrative span, is clearly very widely used in translation history, where much research is presented in the form of case studies and profiles of translators and translation practice. The purpose of many of these studies, more or less explicitly, is to expand the narratives of cultural history to include lives and work whose significance has usually been underestimated or ignored. Consider *Translators through history* edited by Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth (1995), and *Charting the Future of Translation History* edited by George Bastin and Paul Bandia (2006); or, specifically on interpreting history, *Languages and the Military* edited by Hilary Footitt and Michael Kelly (2012), and *New Insights in the History of Interpreting* edited by Kayoko Takeda and Jesús Baigorri-Jalón (2015).

3. Synchrony and diachrony

In his study on the philosophy of history, Daniel Little argues that a compromise between the macro and the micro scales is actually the most fruitful approach, one he calls "meso-history" (2010, 92):

> The choice of scale is always pertinent in historical analysis. And in many instances, I believe that the most interesting analysis takes place at the meso-level. At this level we get explanations that have a great deal of power and breadth, and yet that are also closely tied to the concrete historical experience of the subject matter. (Little 2010, 17)

In as much as it also posits a combination of the synchronic and the diachronic, *histoire croisée* could also be seen as an approach that combines short and long-term temporalities, even though its temporality is not its most defining characteristic:

> One of the contributions of *histoire croisée* is that it makes possible the articulation of both of these dimensions [diachrony and synchrony],

> whereas comparison favours the implementation of a synchronic reasoning, and transfer studies tend toward an analysis of diachronic processes. Crossed history, in contrast, enables the synchronic and diachronic registers to be constantly rearranged in relation to each other. (Werner and Zimmermann 2006, 50)

This raises an interesting point about translation history. All historians engage in a diachronic investigation of some sort, with its own specific timescale, features, perspective and objectives. When historians interact with each other on the basis of a common ground that is defined in relation to this diachronic dimension, then their dialogue will be centred on their shared historical knowledge. But when translation historians enter into conversation with each other (or with other translation scholars), what they have in common is usually not a historical subject (i.e. the diachronic dimension) but their *a priori* interest in translation, a synchronic category which is the premise and defining principle of their research. Their dialogue will therefore tend to be centred on this premise rather than on the history. The potential for the exchange of historical knowledge is improved if a comparative category is devised that is historical in its own right and can provide some diachronic depth to the implicit dialogue between these different histories.

Let me try and illustrate this with the example of two volumes that I have co-edited: *Translation Under Fascism* (Rundle and Sturge 2010) and *Translation Under Communism* (Rundle, Lange, and Monticelli [forthcoming]). The question I want ask here is: what would be the result if we were to adopt a more synchronic approach and unite the studies in these two volumes in a single hypothetical volume on translation and totalitarianism? From one point of view, the comparison would clearly be interesting: methodologically it might resemble the many volumes and special issues that have come out on translation and censorship, where different historical contexts are made comparable by a common theme and by a synchronic, one might say social, interest in translation. On the other hand, the nature of fascist and communist regimes was very different – despite the superficial resemblance of some of their modes of repression and control – while the aim of these studies is to use translation to enhance our understanding of the specific nature of these two ideologies and their many iterations. So it would not make sense from a diachronic (historical) point of view to place these regimes together as if they were merely different variations on a common theme; and any attempt to compare them would be historically very complex, if not

suspect. For similar reasons, we took the decision in *Translation Under Communism* to focus solely on those states within the Soviet sphere of influence (commonly referred to as the Eastern Bloc), so as to avoid making superficial historical comparisons between regimes from radically different cultural and historical backgrounds.

4. Perspective

This leads us to the choice we as historians must make concerning which perspective to adopt towards our research object; a decision that involves both the temporal and ideological dimensions and which depends fundamentally on what interests us, how we select our material, and what our purpose is in doing our research. As Little (2010, 15) puts it:

> Events and actions happened in the past, separate from our interest in them. But to organize them into a narrative […] is to impose a structure of interpretation on them that depends inherently on the interests of the observer. There is no such thing as "perspective-free history." So there is a very clear sense in which we can assert that history is constituted by historical interpretation and traditions of historical interest—even though the events themselves are not.

As well as satisfying our interests, a historical interpretation may also satisfy an ideological aim to which we are committed or, more simply, we may find ourselves interpreting the past in terms that are derived from the present. Alternatively, we may choose to avoid any form of historical anachronism and seek a contextualised approach that attempts to reconstruct a historical context in its own terms.

4.1 Presentism/anachronism

It is interesting to note that it was an objection to the presentism prevalent in historical reconstructions of science that led Thomas Kuhn (1970) to develop his highly influential concept of paradigm shifts as he sought a way of accurately representing and preserving past scientific endeavour that was more respectful of its merits, that did not – with the benefit of hindsight – reduce it to its 'mistakes', and that did not project onto the past, academic traditions that had only existed in the more recent present:

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> Scientist-historians and those who followed their lead characteristically imposed contemporary scientific categories, concepts, and standards on the past. Sometimes a speciality which they traced from antiquity had not existed as a recognized subject for study until a generation before they wrote. Nevertheless, knowing what belonged to it, they retrieved the current contents of the speciality from past texts of a variety of heterogeneous fields, not noticing that the tradition they constructed in the process had never existed. In addition, they usually treated concepts and theories of the past as imperfect approximations to those in current use, thus disguising both the structure and integrity of past scientific traditions. (Kuhn 1977, 149; quoted in Spoerhase 2008, 50)

The way to avoid this kind of presentism, Kuhn argues, is for the historian to forget all knowledge of the current state of research and "learn science anew from the historical sources" (Spoerhase 2008, 51). There is, however, a difference between scientific history and human or social history. In the hard sciences the current paradigm that inevitably conditions your understanding of a past paradigm – where the two are scientifically incompatible with each other – is based on what we think we know at a specific moment in time about the physical world around us. But in history and the social sciences, I would argue that a paradigm shift does not so much change what we know empirically as how we choose to interpret the evidence and the narrative that we construct from it. In other words, there is a much less strict incommensurability between different paradigms in social history. Consequently the 'risks' of presentism are rather different to those outlined by Kuhn.

A classic example of the perceived dangers of presentism in social history is what the British historian Herbert Butterfield called the "Whig fallacy," where the past is teleologically interpreted in terms of the present, usually to fit a narrative of history as progress (Butterfield 1931). This is already a much more relevant way of framing the issue of presentism for translation history because there can be no question that there is a significant body of research in translation studies whose aim is to understand the historical role of translators and translation with a view to influencing the way in which cultural exchange is understood and conducted in the present. This is true of Pym (2000), Tymoczko (2010) and Venuti (1995), that I cited earlier. The presentism of these studies is, of course, entirely conscious and transparent, and its

effectiveness is due to the fact that the committed position of these authors is widely shared by the translation studies community.

But there are also many examples of more contextualised approaches to translation history that are less concerned with the implications of their findings for the present and are more focused on a non-presentist reconstruction of the past. It is not possible to provide a comprehensive list here, but this is generally true, for example, of the range of studies that have been published on translation, fascism, and censorship; although the TRACE group, which works on the censorship of translation in Franco's Spain, explicitly positions itself within the frame of Descriptive Translation Studies and its more positivist programme (cf. Merino and Rabadan 2002).

4.2 Periodization

Our perspective on our historical subject will also depend the periodization we adopt. Establishing a periodization in our historical subject involves both choosing a timescale that is defined on the basis of our sources, and establishing periods that become frames against which we interpret those sources.

In the volume on *Translation Under Fascism* (Rundle and Sturge 2010) that I cited earlier, for example, a clear difference emerges between the pre- and post-WWII regimes, one that is reflected in their respective attitudes to translation. In pre-war Italy and Germany, both countries which defined themselves in opposition to Western democracy, it still seemed possible to police cultural borders, and translations were correspondingly viewed as a form of cultural invasion. In post-war Spain and Portugal, on the other hand, where the geopolitical context had changed significantly and these two ultra-Catholic regimes gradually became tacit allies of the West in its antagonism with communism, it was no longer feasible or desirable to police the cultural borders in the way Italy and Germany had tried to do, and translations were not singled out for special treatment or viewed to the same extent as a form of cultural invasion.

The studies published by the TRACE group on censorship in Francoist Spain also provide an interesting example of how periodization can act as a frame against which to interpret historical sources. The Franco regime lasted almost 40 years, leaving behind such a wealth of archival material that a large group of researchers was required in order to analyse the material systematically. As well as dividing their studies into different areas of interest such as theatre, literature and cinema, and deciding to start by focusing on translations from English, the researchers of the

group also select their periods based on how the regime evolved. So Rioja Barrocal (2010), for example, looks at the period 1962-69 known as the *apertura*, in which the regime adopted a more flexible censorship policy; while Gómez Castro (2008) looks at the final few years of the regime in the 1970s, when the regime's censorship was no longer in the hands of the church. The character of the regime that emerges from these individual case studies is directly related to their choice of period and the policies they describe can only be understood in relation to this periodization.

5. Conclusion

The tension that exists between the diachronic and the synchronic, between the macro and the micro, between the specific and the more general, is a defining characteristic of translation history; a type of history that includes a unique heterogeneity of temporalities, methods, sources and types of insight. And, as I have argued elsewhere (Rundle 2012), how we resolve that tension very much depends on the kind of insight we are seeking and the kind of discourse/knowledge we would like to contribute to.

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