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Introduction

The Historiography of Translation and Interpreting

Christopher Rundle

Translation history: a growing field

Historical perspectives have always played an important part in translation studies, but it was only around the beginning of the 21st century that translation history began to emerge as a specific field, one with its own developing methodology and metadiscourse and its own identifiable body of research – what we might describe as the emergence of a *historiography* of translation and interpreting (Rundle 2019).¹

There were a few key works in the last century that anticipated this development: in 1993 Paul St-Pierre edited a special issue of *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction* (Vol.6 No.1) on “Histoire en traduction” which included his essay “Translation as a Discourse of History” in which St-Pierre set out his idea of a discourse and methodology of translation history; this was followed by Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth’s widely-read *Translators Through History* (1995) (which was also published in French the same year), one of the first books to foreground the historical role of translators in such a way; and then Anthony Pym published *Method in Translation History* (1998) which was, as far as I am aware, the first monograph in English-language translation studies devoted specifically to translation history as a research topic.

Since the turn of the century, we have seen a marked increase in publications on translation history and the gradual development of a specific historiography.² We shall be looking at some of the features of this research and what they mean in terms of the development of the discipline and its historiography, but first I would like to premise this with an overview of some of the initiatives which have contributed to the definition and gradual consolidation of translation history as a disciplinary area in its own right.

A significant contribution to this process of epistemological definition and disciplinary consolidation was made by the *Itineraries in Translation History* series of conferences, held at the universities of Tallinn and Tartu, in Estonia, in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2018; as well as by the many special issues that have appeared on the theme of translation history and its theory and methodology over the last 20 years. For example:

- Special Issue of *Meta*, “History of Translation and Translation of History” (2004), edited by Georges Bastin;
- Special Issue of *Meta*, “The History Lens” (2005), edited by André Clas and Georges Bastin;
- Special Issue of *Translation Studies*, “Rethinking Methods in Translation History” (2012), edited by Carol O’Sullivan;
- Special Issue of *Methis*, “Translation History” (2012), edited by Anne Lange and Daniele Monticelli;

- Special Issue of *MonTI*, “The History of Translation within Translation Studies: Problems in Research and Didactics” (2013), edited by Miguel Ángel Vega Cernuda and Martha Pulido;
- Special Issue of *The Translator*, “Theories and Methodologies of Translation History” (2014), edited by Christopher Rundle;
- Special Issue of *Przekładaniec*, “Translation and Memory” (2019), edited by Magda Heydel and Zofia Ziemann;
- Special Issue of *Translation & Interpreting*, “The History of Translation and Interpreting” (2019), edited by Myriam Salama-Carr.

The increasing awareness of the importance of translation in history, both in and outside of translation studies, is also reflected in the number of large-scale projects that have emerged this century on the role of translated literature within national cultures – although not necessarily from within translation studies. Some significant examples are: the five-volume *Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, edited by Peter France and Stuart Gillespie (four volumes published so far, each with specific editors: 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010); the two histories of translation into Spanish, *Historia de la Traducción en España* (Salamanca: Ambos Mundos, 2004) and *Diccionario histórico de la traducción en España* (Madrid: Gredos, 2009), both edited by Francisco Lafarga and Luis Pegenaute; the four volume project *Histoire des traductions en langue française* coordinated by Yves Chevrel and Jean-Yves Masson (Paris: Verdier, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2019); and the two volume Finnish project, *Suomennoskirjallisuuden historia* edited by H.K. Riikonen, Urpo Kovala, Pekka Kujamäki, and Outi Paloposki (Helsinki: SKS, 2007); the one volume history of translation in Canada, *La traduction au Canada, 1534-1984*, edited by Jean Delisle, Christel Gallant, and Paul A. Horguelin (Ottawa, Presses de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1987); as well as national databases like the Swedish biographical database of translators, *Svenskt översättarlexikon* (litteraturbanken.se/översättarlexikon), and transnational projects such as the research group based at the University of Montreal on the history of translation in Latin America, *Histoire de la traduction en Amérique latine (HISTAL)* (www.histal.net).³

The impressive growth in scholarly research on translation and interpreting history has also led to the launch of at least three book series which publish in English dedicated to translation history:

- *Routledge Research in Translation and Interpreting History*, published by Routledge and edited by Christopher Rundle and Pekka Kujamäki;
- *Studien zur Übersetzungsgeschichte* [Studies on the History of Translation], published by Franz Steiner Verlag and edited by Andreas Gipper, Lavinia Heller and Robert Lukenda (the series publishes in German, English, French and Italian);
- *Translation History* published by Palgrave Macmillan and edited by Andrea Rizzi, Anthony Pym, Birgit Lang, Belén Bistué, Esmaeil Haddadian Moghaddam and Kayoko Takeda.

Also, a new scholarly journal dedicated to translation history was recently launched by the University of Vienna: *Chronotopos - A Journal of Translation History* (chronotopos.eu); as far as I am aware, the first journal of its kind.

There have also been some significant initiatives in terms of consolidating the position of translation history as a discipline in its own right: the University of Vienna has launched an annual *Summer School on Translation History* (summerschool-translation-history.univie.ac.at); and a new international association called the *History and Translation Network* (historyandtranslation.net) will be launched in 2021, with the aim of fostering collaboration between scholars of all disciplinary backgrounds who share an interest in the history of translation and interpreting.

The metadiscourse of translation history

One significant sign that a field of research is acquiring a disciplinary identity is the presence of a well-developed metadiscourse. I have already mentioned the many special issues which are testimony to an increasing desire to interrogate how we carry out historical research on translation, and there are also a number of volumes which have come out since the turn of the century which engage with the metadiscourse of translation history, demonstrating an increasing sense of the field developing its own disciplinary identity. One of the first was *Charting the Future of Translation History*, edited by Georges Bastin and Paul Bandia (2006), and significantly, they state in their introduction that the main research questions of the volume are: should the history of translation draw much more on history and historiography? and should the field develop its own methodology and research techniques (Bastin and Bandia 2006: 2)? Another important volume is *Between Cultures and Texts: Itineraries in Translation History*, edited by Antoine Chalvin, Anne Lange and Daniele Monticelli (2011). This is a collection of papers from the first *Itineraries in Translation History* Conference, which took place in Tallinn in 2010, and was, as far as I am aware, the first international conference on translation history and one of the first events at which one began to sense the forming of a community of translation historians.⁴ Just seven years later, after at least six special issues on translation history had come out (see the list above), the field was already much more developed, as testified by the volume *A History of Modern Translation Knowledge: Sources, Concepts, Effects*, edited by Yves Gambier and Lieven D'hulst (2018). One might describe the purpose of the volume as that of seeking to construct an epistemology of translation history. Particularly significant in terms of our discussion here is the section on “Historicizing Knowledge” (2018: 231–281) which covers issues such as, concepts of historical time, historical archives, microhistory, comparative history, *histoire croisée* and others. The volume *What Is Translation History? A Trust-Based Approach*, by Andrea Rizzi, Birgit Lang, and Anthony Pym (2019), is the inaugural book of the new Palgrave series on translation history (see details above) and is an interesting example of establishing an *a priori* category or concept derived from translation practice through which to examine history. And to conclude this selection of theoretical books on translation history, there is the volume on *Literary Translation in Periodicals: Methodological Challenges for a Transnational Approach*, edited by Laura Fóllica, Diana Roig-Sanz, and Stefania Caristia (2020). Although the focus of the volume is on translations in periodicals, the theoretical reflections it offers on historical research methods and transnational approaches to literary history are relevant to all translation historians, and the volume is notable for its interdisciplinary selection of authors.

The *Routledge Handbook of Translation History*, then, is intended to position itself within this growing field and provide scholars and students with a range of examples of what research into the history of translation and interpreting can be, both in terms of the themes covered and of the methods and approaches used.

A three dimensional approach to translation history

It is possible to view the evolution of historical studies on translation and interpreting as a three-stage process, and to view each of these stages as the adding of a further dimension to how we study the history of translation; the implication being that all three dimensions are necessary.⁵ The first stage was that which pre-dated translation studies as a recognised discipline, one where historical interest in translation was largely the preserve of literary scholars and where the dominant concern was with the **texts** and how they were translated, and with the aesthetic discourse surrounding these texts.

Then, as translation studies became established, with its own disciplinary identity, historians of translation increasingly began to take an interest in the **translators**, as social beings and as people who played (an often unacknowledged) role in history. The addition of this second dimension also brought with it an interest in interpreting history, one which necessarily looks beyond the ‘text’ of a mediation at the interpreters themselves. One of the frequent features of this second dimension is a presentist approach to history, where the past lives and practices of translators and interpreters are used to inform current practices and ethical concerns.

Finally, as the study of translation began to acquire a paradigmatic value that both encouraged greater interdisciplinarity and promoted a translational approach to other disciplinary areas, a third dimension was added to the way translation history is conducted, one which focused on the **context**. The main characteristic of the research that includes this dimension is the premise that any history of translation or interpreting must be contextualised within the history of the period/context in which the translation events being studied occurred.

The inescapable implication of situating translation within its historical context, I would argue, is a greater engagement with the ‘non-translation’ historiography of that context; an engagement which can have an impact on how we narrate our history and on which paradigms and discourse we choose to frame our research in. Related to this is the idea that translation can also function as an approach to history, rather than just being the object of inquiry: a translational lens through which to examine history, and not just an object being examined through a historical lens.⁶

This idea of there being three dimensions to translation history is not intended as a theoretical paradigm. I am not suggesting that these are fixed categories or that scholars identify themselves with them. I use the metaphor of a ‘dimension’ because I want to suggest a narrative of progress, one where a three dimensional view is qualitatively more complete than a one or two dimensional view. What I am proposing is a *longue durée* history of translation history, a narrative of its evolution: one where historical interest in translation went from being a strand of literary history to being an identifiable research field within translation studies the moment such research ceased

to be one-dimensional and translators were added to the historical narrative. And I am further suggesting that translation history moved on from being a strand of translation studies and began to evolve into a disciplinary field in its own right, the moment it became three dimensional and added *history itself* to the narrative by including the context.

Future prospects

As things stand, each dimension (or approach, if you will) has to some extent developed its own discourse predicated on its distinct set of priorities and, essentially, on what scholars are interested in. I think it is fair to say that translation history does not, as yet, have a shared discourse that includes all three dimensions. I am also convinced that although translation historians are united by a diachronic interest in translation, their individual research cannot come together as a unified, or universal, history of translation merely by virtue of this synchronic premise. To bring such diverse research together into a single historical narrative would mean abstracting the different historical contexts in which each translation event necessarily takes place, thereby obscuring the close, co-dependent, relationship between history and translation and effectively stripping this research of its historical insight.

Consider the impossibility of defining an overarching narrative for the research in this handbook and the reader will, I believe, see my point. Can there really be a paradigm, meta structure or set of categories which can unite such a range of different histories into a single meaningful narrative? Personally, I don't believe so, but I am aware that others might consider such a unifying narrative both possible and meaningful.

Instead of such an idealistic project, I believe that translation and interpreting historians have much to gain (more prosaically but also rewardingly) from doing two things, essentially: firstly, sharing their methodological and theoretical concerns with other translation historians, and identifying common research topics that are rooted in history, as opposed to just translation; and secondly, developing closer ties with historians (of whatever disciplinary background) who share an interest in the specific historical context or topic they work on, rather than simply an *a priori* interest in translation (Rundle 2012; Rundle 2014).

Presenting the volume

My purpose in putting together this collection of essays has been to foreground what I have called the second and third dimensions to translation history, and especially the third – because I feel that it is this dimension that needs promoting within translation history. This volume is intended to project an idea of what translation and interpreting history *can be*, not just what it is at the moment.

To this end, I have made a concerted effort, both to find new voices on well-known topics and to include a significant number of scholars who are not from the disciplinary area of translation studies.

The role of the editor

As editor, I am aware that this collection is not a complete representation of all the research being done on translation and interpreting history and that, inevitably, there will be some significant gaps. Unfortunately, for some of the themes I had planned to include, it proved impossible to recruit a suitable author, and in other cases, the author was forced to withdraw from the project and could not be replaced.

I am also aware that this handbook will reflect my own cultural and geographical background. Any edited collection will, and should, reflect the particular interests and concerns of the editor; and I don't feel that the editor should apologize for this, it is part of their task to conceive and plan the collection and to give it a specific character and focus. Too often in the humanities the input of the editor in designing a volume of collected essays and giving it an identity, a project, is ignored or minimised. If one accepts this premise, then one must accept that any edited collection, and this is no exception, will also reflect the editor's academic and intellectual interests, it will reflect the discourse which he/she inhabits – with its inevitable limits.

At the same time, once an author has agreed to write on certain topic, the editor can only exert a subtle influence over how that topic is developed and cannot expect the author to necessarily share their concerns and priorities. Thus, from a carefully planned and (in theory) coherent proposal, a very different and less coordinated collection emerges. This is both inevitable and essentially desirable: the heterogeneity of the authors' responses to the editor's initial brief is a guarantee that the final collection extends well beyond the limits of the editor's individual horizon of expectations.

The contents of the volume

The volume is organized into four main sections: 1. Methods and Theories, 2. Interdisciplinary Approaches, 3. Cultures and Religions and 4. Key Themes. Within each section, chapters are ordered alphabetically by author.

Section One, *Methods and Theories*, presents a selection of studies on some of the key theories and methodologies that have had an impact on translation and interpreting history and offer a sample of the some of the metadiscourse which has developed on translation history. The section starts with an essay by **Lieven D'hulst** which reflects on the history and evolution of translation history as a discipline and suggests how the discipline might develop in future. **Hilary Footitt** then discusses the methodological issues concerning research into the history of interpreting, in particular the difficulty of researching the history of a spoken activity. **Cristina Gomez Castro** examines the use of linguistic corpora and other electronic tools in historical research on translation, reflecting on both their advantages and their drawbacks. **Sue-Ann Harding** looks at the impact that narrative theory has had on historical research on translation, including both narrative as a way of understanding historical writing and narrative as a way of understanding communication and the way we construct our sense of reality. Based in part on her own experience editing a history of translation in Finland, **Outi Paloposki** reflects on the idea of a national translation tradition or history and the issues this kind of project can pose. **Anthony**

Pym discusses the conceptual tools used in Western translation history and how they might be adapted to promote a more plural approach – with a particular focus on importance of trust and collaboration. **Jeroen Vandaele** examines the relationship between Descriptive Translation Studies and translation history and the potential tension between them. The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu has been very influential in translation studies and **Michaela Wolf** reflects on the contribution that his methodological tools can make to historical research on translation.

Section Two, *Interdisciplinary Approaches*, includes six chapters by scholars from outside translation studies who reflect on the relationship between their disciplinary area and translation history; demonstrating the significant level of interdisciplinary dialogue that has developed.

Antonio Bibbò looks at the interaction between translation history and comparative literature, in particular how this can favour transnational approaches to the study of literature and literary exchanges. **Paul Cohen** is a historian who has long taken an interest in the history of language and in the role played in history by language intermediaries, and in his chapter he looks at the politics of language in early modern France. Philosophy scholar **Lisa Foran** offers an examination of how translation has been viewed by historians of philosophy, with a particular focus on Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida and the more recent work of Barbara Cassin. Professional sign-language interpreter and researcher **Anne Leahy** looks at the role of sign language interpreting in Anglo-American legal history and the evolution over the centuries of protocols for managing deaf parties in court. **Susan Pickford** looks at the relationship between book history and translation, and analyses the evolution of the *Society for History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing* (SHARP) and the way that translation has become an increasingly important theme in its conferences. **Philip Wilson** examines the contribution that the philosophy of history can make to translation history and suggest areas for further research including, amongst others, the idea that translation theory should be read in its historical context.

Section Three, *Cultures and Religions*, includes seven chapters which are intended to represent a selection of the cultural and religious contexts in which the translation history has become a significant research topic. **Rebekah Clements** looks at the terminology used to indicate translation in pre-modern Japan revealing the different attitudes of translators towards the act of translation as well as a range of practices which do not necessarily fall within contemporary notions of what constitutes translation. **Abigail Gillman** looks at translation within the Jewish tradition, which is premised on the centrality of words and text to the Jewish religion, and highlights four ‘translational turns’ which have taken place in relation to key moments in Jewish history. **Matthew Kraus** examines translation in the Christian tradition by looking at the fourth and fifth centuries CE, a period of significant religious translations, and argues that translation history and Christianity have had a profound impact on each other. **Padma Rangarajan** analyses the intersection between translation practice and the use of violence as a tool of nationalist resistance in India at the beginning of the twentieth century, by examining the work of three early Indian nationalists: Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Subramania Bharati, and VVS Aiyar. **Tarek Shamma** offers a study of the discourse on translation during the Classical age of Islam, where he focuses on the tension between relativist and universalist perspectives on language and culture which, he argues, were the product of specific historical contexts. **Karin Sibul** looks at the history of

interpreting in Estonia in relation to its evolution as a nation state, first as an independent Republic after WWI and then as a Soviet Republic after WWII, and in the context of the changing policies towards the Estonian language. **Serena Talento** examines the role of translation in post-independence Tanzania and the relationship between translation practice and the construction of Tanzanian socialism, known as *ujamaa*.

Section Four, *Key Themes*, presents nine case studies on a selection of themes which have been particularly significant both in translation history and in translation studies in general. **Stefania Arcara** examines the documents produced by the women's movement in the West in the 1970s and their translations, and uses this study to challenge current academic definitions of "feminist translation" which, she argues, differ significantly from the way it was understood by the feminist activists of the 1970s. **Jacob Blakesley** uses distant reading and sociological theory to examine the history of the translation of Dante's *Divina commedia*; including both its reception around the world and specifically its translation into English. Using some unique archival material **Pekka Kujamäki** recounts the experience of a Finnish military interpreter, Jyrki Kolkkala, and his liaison duties with the German armed forces during WWII, and discusses the insights his experience can give us into the cultural and ideological constraints of this specific historical context. **Patrick Leech** uses translation to look at the history of the eighteenth century from a transnational perspective, focusing on how translations between English and French contributed to the circulation of the ideas of the Enlightenment and arguing that these transnational exchanges were a key feature of the period. **Alison E. Martin** looks at travel writing and translation history, framing them both as forms of cross-cultural encounter, and traces the influential role they played from the early modern period up to the twenty-first century. Based on extensive archival research, **Carla Mereu Keating and Carol O'Sullivan** start from the birth of the 'talkies' in the 1920s to examine the history of audiovisual translation and the various methods of localization that were used in order to market films internationally. **Diana Roig-Sanz** looks at the translation activities of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation during the interwar period, showing how translation was used to promote international cooperation and suggesting that the policies of the Institute were one of the first attempts at a transnational translation policy. **Malgorzata Tryuk** examines the history of translation and interpreting under Fascism and Nazism in the 1930s-40s, touching upon translation under these regimes in Italy and Germany, translation and interpreting in contexts of repression such as prisons and concentration camps, and in countries under Nazi occupation. **Maria Zalambani and Ilaria Lelli** look at the censorship of literary translation in the Soviet Union and how translators were influenced by a power structure that went from the Party, to the Writers' Union, to the Translators' Section within the Union.

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, I use ‘translation history’ throughout this essay to mean both translating and interpreting history.

² For the purposes of this discussion I will restrict myself to research that has been published in English; but translation history is becoming a significant disciplinary area within translation studies in other languages as well. See, for example: Chalvin *et al* (2019); D’hulst (2014); Lombez (2019); and Richter (2020).

³ See Paloposki, chapter 5 in this handbook, and her discussion of national histories of translation.

⁴ An international workshop on *Rethinking Methods in Translation History* was held in September 2009 at the Department of Translation Studies of Okan University in Turkey, but this event was by invitation only.

⁵ Though the idea that I am putting forward here is very different, and specific to translation history, the notion that history as a field of intellectual inquiry developed in a three stage process is one that is widely held: a development that went (or one might say *progressed*) from early annals, to medieval chronicles, to modern historiography. Annals consisted of facts reported in sequence without any clear organizing principle other than the year in which the events took place and without any hierarchy; chronicles were events reported in sequence around a unifying principle, such as a place, a person or an institution, with some narrative elements but no clear beginning and end, so no real emplotment, and no clear hierarchy; and finally histories are accounts in which events are selected according to a defining principle and on the basis of their significance with respect to this principle, which is then manifested in the way the events are emplotted, interpreted and narrated. For a discussion of this notion see, for example, Hayden White (1980) and the response by Louis O. Mink (1981).

⁶ For a discussion of this approach, see my position paper, “Translation as an Approach to History” (2012), and the responses by Paul St-Pierre, Theo Hermans and Dirk Delabastita.