

Conference Report

“WHY TRANSLATION STUDIES MATTERS”

5th EST Congress, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 3–5 September 2007

The fifth EST Congress was held in Ljubljana during a cold wave with occasional rains. Apart from that, Ljubljana was a likeable place, with pleasant riverside restaurants along the Ljubljanica. (Etymologically the name Ljubljana is related to the verb *ljubiti*, ‘like/love’.) The business of the Congress was done in one of the buildings of the University of Ljubljana, and even a critical mind had very little fault to find with the organisation. There were no loud announcements or nervous fussing about by worried organisers, yet everyone could find their way. There was just one tiny oversight: congress organisers tend to forget that name badges are for identifying people. What is the use of a name badge hanging from someone’s neck if all you can read on it (without trespassing on private territory) is the name of the congress? What are you expected to do, when you are trying to find someone? Should you go up to people, grab their name badge, read it, and turn away without a word if s/he is not the one? Or should you say politely, thank you, I definitely do not want to talk to you?

The name of the Congress defined its character: Does TS/IS matter? Does theory matter? The choice of the congress theme shows that TS still, or again, has a sense of insecurity (or inferiority?) and still (or again?) feels under pressure. TS people feel that TS must be like any other academic discipline, with a solid theoretical basis, but at the same time they cannot give up the ambition to be useful to the profession – to remain applied, or applicable. This puts TS under pressure from both sides.

Hardly had TS grown out of its childhood diseases when it was sent back to square one. The advent of computer technology, globalisation and localisation has again added to the rift between theory and practice. The gap now seems unbridgeable: it is as hard as or harder than ever to convince practitioners that theory matter to them, even though in a recent book Chesterman seemed to sort of convince Emma Wagner that theory does matter even to EU translators. TS cannot choose to retire to the ivory tower of academia to live for and on pure theory (and feel superior to everyone else), either: it has been claiming too long that it is an applied science to find a comfortable niche among the academic disciplines that never had pretensions of applicability.

The Congress offered a lot of interesting papers both in the theory and the practice of TS and IS. Needless to say, you cannot go to six parallel sessions simultaneously, so this report cannot give anything but a few glimpses – small fragments of the whole. (I was really sorry that I had to give a paper at a time when there were four other interesting papers presented.)

The plenaries offered food for thought. Birgitta Englund Dimitrova (Sweden) raised a number of interesting ideas. In a nutshell, what she and some other people claim is that literal translation is a basic translation strategy. This can be explained by the need to optimize working memory resources. The strategy can be summarised like this: “Try literal translation first.” When a chunk of language is translated literally, it is evaluated and revised using the monitor and taking pragmatic information into account. However, not all literal translations that should be removed or altered are removed in the revision phase (which may account for source text interference). The extent of literal translation depends on language combination, text type, translation norms, type of task, time available, translator’s competence (there is a difference between the literal translations of professionals and novices), and the translator’s individual preferences. All this links up very nicely with Klaudy and Károly’s asymmetry theory, for which new evidence was presented in the Corpus Analysis section.

There were 14 sessions: Literature, Theory (1), Training, Competences, Processes (2), Theories, Paradigms, Models (3), Ideology, Translation Policy (4), Interpreting (5), Profession (6), TS and Music and Menus (7), Terminology (8), Corpus Analysis (9), TS and Poetry (10), Linguistics and TS (11), Screen Translation, Dubbing, Subtitling (12), TS and Theatre (13), Effects of TS on other areas (14). Session 1 was renamed on subsequent days as “Literature, Novels, Short Stories” and then “Literature, Culture, History”; Session 3 also surfaced under the name “Theory, Interdisciplinarity, Scientometrics. (Of course, Sessions 10 and 13 can be regarded as sub-sessions of Session 1.)

Literature. The number of papers in the various literary sessions shows that the study of literary translation continues to fascinate many people. Retranslation, cultural problems, translating Shakespeare, classical Chinese poetry and Francophone Senegalese women’s poetry, metatextual elements or meta-discourse and “relation markers” (Christiane Nord, Germany) were some of the topics I noted and missed, since there was always something in other sessions I was more interested in. (Here I may mention that the abstracts, as we go to press, are still available on the conference website.)

Interdisciplinarity. Translation has always been an interdisciplinary enterprise, and the Congress theme induced even more emphasis on interdisciplinarity than usual. Most participants took pains to emphasize interdisciplinarity and to show how TS matters to other disciplines or vice

versa. From the point of view of congruence between Congress theme and papers presented, the Congress was a great success.

In the Interpretation session Franz Pöchhacker (Austria) argued convincingly that IS undoubtedly matters to interpreter training and IS researchers – and maybe for some other people (professional practice, users). He noted that self-doubt remains a problem, and IS finds it difficult to influence other disciplines: there are barriers to interdisciplinary dissemination of the results.

Interdisciplinarity in IS seems to be especially related to the increasing involvement of psycholinguistics. The strengthening connection was evident in Englund Dimitrova's plenary paper, too, which was very much about psycholinguistic processes in the translator, invoking such household psycholinguistic concepts as the bilingual mind, activation and deactivation, the monitor, working memory and so on. Agnieszka Chmiel (Poland) was very optimistic about the value of TS/IS to psycholinguistics, and vice versa. Speaking at an amazing rate of about 500 words per minute, she succeeded in proving that IS and psycholinguistics matter to each other: IS can take advantage of the methodology of psycholinguistics, and the latter can also gain a lot by studying interpreters, who represent a special case of bilinguals. Success in interpreting depends on parallel involvement of multiple memory systems, and the possibility of studying this may be a boon for psycholinguistics. Another interdisciplinary aspect was provided by a joint paper by Ahrens and Kalderonova, in which neurophysiology was enlisted for the study of interpretation. I was persuaded that Interpreting Studies is thriving, and its association with psycholinguistics and neurophysiology may open up new avenues of research.

Kaisa Koskinen's (Finland) paper also had to do with interdisciplinarity. She considered the problem whether developments in the professional field and cultural contacts mattered to TS, and concluded that ethical issues must be given more attention. Siobhan Brownlie (UK) gave an interesting paper on how difficult it proved in practice to achieve communication across disciplines, e.g. to publish a study using the concepts and methodology of TS in a literary journal. Nadja Grbic and Sonja Poellabauer (Austria) claimed that scientometrics matters to TS (whether this is good news remains to be seen).

The interest in the relations between ideology and translation also shows that TS scholars are serious about interdisciplinarity. It is also an indication of the growing sociological bias in the field. Translation and ideology papers included at least five on the plight of translators under dictatorial regimes (in Spain, Portugal and former Socialist countries). The translation of children's literature in Slovenia in the socialist era was discussed by Nike Kocijančič-Pokorn (Slovenia), and English-language books for young people in East Germany by Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth (UK).

Christina Schäffner explained why TS matters to politics (unfortunately I had to give my own paper at the time). Great interest (and an overflowing audience) was drawn by Mary Snell-Hornby who spoke against the increasing anglicization of TS – the excessive use of English in scientific journals and meetings. She thinks that of all people, translators and students of translation should try to be really multilingual and maintain the use of conference languages other than English. Is it too much to ask of someone who studies translation that s/he should have at least a passive knowledge of a language other than English? She recommended passive multilingualism as a route of escape from English linguistic imperialism.

The profession. Session 6 (Profession) reflected the gut feeling of most TS researchers that their results must be relevant to the practice of translation – TS **must** matter to the profession. In an interesting paper Anne Schjoldager (Denmark) divided the history of TS into four stages: the linguistically oriented 1970s, the communicatively-functionally oriented 1980s, the culturally and cognitively oriented 1990s and the present sociologically-oriented stage, with the social and sociolinguistic aspects of the practice of translation and the translators' status and working conditions coming into focus. Translation has become a commodity, and professional standards must be maintained. In this context, quality assurance is a must, and editing and revising are becoming more and more important. Revising skills should be taught in translator training and more research should be concerned with this aspect of the profession. Helle Dam and Karen Korning Zethsen (Denmark) reported on a survey on the status of the professional translator. An interesting paper by Kriistina Abdallah (Finland) analysed the situation of professional translators based on network theory. Due to the increasing tendency towards outsourcing, translators have less direct contact with commissioners, and have to find their place in a production network.

The social and sociolinguistic aspects of translation and interpretation were also present in several papers on court interpretation.

Training. Work done by the PACTE Group (Alison Beeby et alia, Spain) is now a major influence in this area. The group are producing increasingly comprehensive and increasingly sophisticated models of translation competence. Their work has reached the phase where validation of the model and studying the acquisition of translation competence is put on the agenda.

Other people are studying the topic of expert knowledge in translation. Here I must confess that the relation between competence and expert knowledge is not always clear to me. It would also be interesting to read a discussion on the link between models of translation competence and the psycholinguistic aspects of the literal translation strategy described by Englund Dimitrova. A paper on genre transfer competence (Krisztina Károly, Hungary) focussed on an aspect of

translation competence that may have to be accommodated within the PACTE competence model.

Topics related to training included the use of corpora in translator training, CAT tools and e-learning. However, the use of technology did not have a very high profile. One of the participants I met was a refugee from technology-dominated translation conferences: he said he preferred the more humanistic approach still present at EST congresses.

Several papers given in the sessions on training took pains to demonstrate that TS does matter to translator training. Jelena Pralas (Montenegro) argued that translation research may be used in teaching translation. Ilse Feinauer (South Africa) raised the problem whether translation theory could help in the training of literary translators. In a thorough and very well-presented paper Iwona Mazur (Poland) reported on an empirical study designed to find out whether theory (information on functional approaches to translation, text typology, *Skopos* theory, theory of translational action and translation strategies) and information on the context of translation (the *skopos* of the text, its commissioner, target audience, etc.) can help practice, i.e. enable students to translate culture-specific items (CSIs) better. The paper was all the more interesting because it was not based on literary texts, but newspaper articles on economics topics. She found that translation theory does indeed translate into practice as regards CSIs. She also pointed out that more emphasis should be placed on translating CSIs in translation courses and promoting cultural awareness, so that later on students could become “cultural mediators in the interconnected world”.

Jan Pedersen’s (Sweden) paper was also related to culture-specific items, but he called them Extralinguistic Cultural References (ECRs). This stimulating paper related training to theory and research. The theory was that TS should be descriptive, not prescriptive, but Descriptive Translation Studies may uncover translation norms, and trainees may benefit from seeing what norms are followed by practicing translators. They can be advised, e.g. “if you have an ECR of the *x* kind, then it can be shown that it is usually solved in manner *y*, under circumstances *z*.” The research concerned Scandinavian subtitling norms with Anglophone films.

Gyde Hansen (Denmark) reported on a longitudinal study, surveying graduates of translation courses ten years after graduation to see how TS helped or did not help them in their profession. Dorothy Kelly (Spain) discussed trainer competence. Several papers were concerned with L1-L2 translation.

There was also a round table discussion on the Bologna reform and its consequences. Many participants think that BA courses are desirable, because students can enter the labour market after 3,5 or 4 years of training and work as court interpreters, bilingual secretaries, etc. To attain a solid base of translation competence and technological know-how, the sooner the training starts, the

better. On the other hand, the European Commission supports training at the MA level and proposed a model curriculum for a European Master's in translation. It also published a list of competences for Commission translators.

Let me mention in this connection the talk I had with one of the participants from Switzerland one evening about the problems of accrediting translation as a degree course at M.A. level. According to the general rules of accreditation, in an M.A. course you need instructors with doctor's degrees and a high citation index, but if you want to train translators for the job of translating, the majority of instructors should be practising translators or interpreters. However, in the course of a successful career in translation practising translators and interpreters will have found that they can do the job without having obtained a PhD degree in translation. One wonders why the same criteria apply to trainers in an M.A. course in theoretical linguistics and an M.A. course in translation. The proportion of theoretical and practical subjects must necessarily be different, so why do we expect instructors of practical subjects to be members of the Academy of Science?

Translation Universals and Corpus Analysis. In the Corpus Analysis section Kinga Klaudy and Krisztina Károly presented further evidence in support of Klaudy's asymmetry hypothesis. Apparently, the number of *hogy*-clauses in Hungarian (corresponding to English *that*-clauses) increases in English–Hungarian translation, since many participle constructions are translated by *hogy*-clauses. This may be regarded as a manifestation of explicitation. However, in Hungarian–English translation there does not appear to be a corresponding drop in the number of *that*-clauses in English: participle constructions do not replace clauses as often as one would expect – in other words, implicitation (in H–E translation) is less frequent than explicitation (in E–H translation). In this, as I mentioned above, the strategy of literal translation may also play a role.

Josep Marco (Spain) talked about a corpus-based study of the translation of phraseology. This is a fascinating – and I would say new – field. In translating phraseological units (PUs), you can have a number of correspondences: PU – non-PU, PU – collocation, PU – similar PU, PU – different PU, collocation – PU, No PU – PU. The study was aimed at investigating translation universals, i.e. whether normalisation can be observed in the translation of PUs. The answer so far seems to be in the negative, but this is ongoing research.

Stella Neumann (Germany) reported on an impressive new bilingual corpus (The CroCo Corpus) making use of all sorts of annotations and alignment enabling researchers to obtain meaningful information on explicitation, normalization, shining-through, etc. I am sure we shall hear of this corpus bearing fruit.

Mette Hjort-Pedersen and Dorrit Faber (Denmark) reported on a carefully designed empirical study of explicitation and implicitation in legal translation.

They started from the assumption that explicitation would be relatively rare in this field. Kathelijne Denturck and Sofie Niemegeers gave an interesting account of work on explicitation in the area of modal particles and connectors based on a corpus of Dutch/French source texts and Dutch/French translated texts.

David Limon (Slovenia) gave a rich and thought-provoking paper on whether cultural mediation involves explicitation. He studied L1–L2 translations (Slovenian into English) by translators working “away from their mother tongue” or “translating into a non-mother tongue”. (It is noteworthy that most Slovenian translators do more work into a non-mother tongue than into their mother tongue.) He found that due to various factors there was less explicitation in these translations than you would expect or consider necessary.

Simos Grammenidis also studied translation into a non-mother tongue – the translation of Greek restaurant menus into foreign languages. He found that these translations were rarely done by professionals, and they usually fell short of their informative and appellative function, mainly because they failed to use explicitation. Apparently, the amusing session title “TS and Music and Menus” owed its name to this paper.

What was missing? What we really missed was the presence of some people who had contributed to TS a great deal – Baker, Chesterman, Pym, Tirkkonen-Condit, to name just a few. As for topics, relevance theory was not in evidence, and linguistic micro-analyses also kept a low profile. And, in spite of the number of papers in the “Theory” sessions, grand new theories did not seem to be very thick on the floor, or else I failed to hear the ones that were really grand. Reading the abstracts I thought Ubaldo Stecconi’s (European Commission) paper may present a sort of new, unifying theory based on semiotics, and I did have the opportunity to hear it. However, I should probably have taken a pre-Congress course in semiotics to be able to properly follow it.

All in all, it was a good and useful congress. In spite of all the uncertainties and doubts, TS seems to be developing its own methodology and is making important advances in many areas.

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