TWO APPROACHES TO THE POSITIONING OF TRANSLATED TEXTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ITAMAR EVEN - ZOHAR'S POLYSYSTEM STUDIES AND GIDEON TOURY'S DESCRIPTIVE TRANSLATION STUDIES AND BEYOND

Harry Aveling 1

Abstract: This paper provides an analysis of the work of two contemporary scholars of Translation theory, Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, both of whom work at the University of Tel Aviv. Their studies draw on Russian Formalism. Even-Zohar's Polysystem theory pays attention to the ways in which source texts are received by the target culture and within its "literary polysystem". He particularly emphasises the way in which source texts are selected by the target literature, and the way in which translated works adopt specific norms, behaviours, and policies which are part of that receiving system. Gideon Toury also sees the act of translation as fulfilling a function allotted by the receiving community and extends Even-Zohar's discussion by a more detailed consideration of the role of norms in the translation process. The paper suggests that Toury's ideas have been more readily accepted by the academic community because of the fit with other dimensions of contemporary thought.

Key words: translated texts, literary polysystem, Russian formalism

INTRODUCTION

During the 1970s, Israel made an important contribution to the development of Translation Studies through work in "systemic studies"

Harry Aveling, is an Associate Professor of Indonesian and Malay in the Department of Asian Studies at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, and Adjunct Professor of Southeast Asian Literature at Ohio University. He holds the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy, in Malay Studies, from the National University of Singapore, and Doctor of Creative Arts, in Writing, from the University of Technology, Sydney.

undertaken at the Department of Poetics and Comparative Literature, Tel Aviv University (Weissbrod, 1998). This work reflected the complex relationships of multiple cultures and languages which are characteristic of the region. As Edwin Gentzler dramatically notes: "in the fragile diplomatic and political situation in the Middle East ... Russian culture does meet Anglo-American; Moslem meets Jewish; social and historical forces from the past influence the present; multilingualism is more prevalent than monolingualism; exiles are as common as 'local' nationals. To understand one's past, one's identity, an understanding of translation in and of itself is crucial; translation ceases to be an elite intellectual 'game', a footnote to literary scholarship, but becomes fundamental to the lives and livelihood of everyone in the entire region (and maybe the world)" (Gentzler, 2001:107).

The aim of the Department of Poetics and Comparative Literature, founded in 1966, was not to study one or even a number of literary traditions, but poetics itself, "literature as literature", through descriptive research within the framework of a set of theoretical assumptions. These assumptions relied heavily on the work of the Russian Formalists of the 1920s and their successors the Prague structuralists (Weissbrod, 1998).

This paper focuses on two theoretical approaches to translation which have arisen from work undertaken in Tel Aviv. The first is Polystem Theory, developed by Itamar Even-Zohar; the second is Descriptive Translation Studies, developed by Gideon Toury. Even-Zohar was born in Tel Aviv in 1939, and completed his doctoral thesis "An Introduction to the Theory of Literary Translation" at Tel Aviv University in 1972; Sales Salvador describes this work as "the matrix" of [his] polysystem theory (salvador, 2002). The slightly younger Gideon Toury completed his doctorate in 1976, with Even-Zohar as his "ally and guide" (Schlesinger, 2000)². Both scholars are now leading members of the Unit for Culture Research at Tel Aviv University ³.

RUSSIAN FORMALISM AND PRAGUE STRUCTURALISM

Russian Formalism can be said to have begun with Victor Shlovskij's pamphlet *The resurrection of the word* (1914)⁴ and come to a premature end with his politically motivated recantation in January 1930. The movement

In his interview with Sales Salvador, Even-Zohar describes himself as Toury's "mentor".

See http://www.tau.ac.il/tarbut/index.html

A translation of this essay can be found in Russian Formalism. Edited by S. Bann and J. Bowlt. Edinburgh: Academic Press, 1973:41-47.

was centred around two student groups, the Moscow Linguistic Circle (founded in 1915) and the *Opojaz* (Obscestvo izucenija poeticesckogo jazyka, Society for the Study of Poetic Language) group in Saint Petersburg (1916) (cited in Jefferson, 1982:16).

The Formalists "did not have a single position, a single literary doctrine; yet their work was a collective one, and possesses a unity of development in time" (Jameson, 1972:47). Their major concern was with "the investigation of the specific properties of literary material ... the properties that distinguish such material from material of any other kind" (Eixenbaum, 1971:7). This statement emphasises both the formal characteristics of "literariness" (literaturnost) and its difference from other orders of facts. The purpose of literary "properties", or artistic "devices" (ibid, 1971:13)5, was, firstly, to shape language and, secondly, to "defamiliarise" or "make strange" (ostranie) "those things that have become habitual or automatic" (Erlich, 1969:76). Shklovskij suggests: "A dance is a walk which is felt; even more accurately, it is a walk which is constructed to be felt" (cited in Jefferson, 1982:19)6. Similarly, "Poetic speech is formed speech", shaped by formal devices such as rhyme and rhythm, which "act on ordinary words to renew our perception of them, and of their sound texture in particular" (ibid, 1982:20). The history of "literariness" is "the ebb and flow" (Erlich, 1969:92) of disjunctions based on the inevitable automatization of current literary devices and their replacement by new, again unfamiliar, conventions and devices (ibid, 1969:23-24). Some of these techniques will be spontaneous; others will enter "the mainline of literary development" or "canon" (Shklovskij), from foreign literatures, or marginal and popular genres (ibid, 1969:34).7

While language was central to Formalist definitions of literature (Jefferson, 1982:36) it was their successors, the Prague Linguistic Circle (founded in 1926 by Roman Jakobson, first chairman of the Moscow Linguistic Circle who had moved to Czechoslovakia six years earlier), who reformulated Formulist literary theories within a linguistic framework derived from (or at least very similar to) the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure (Robey, 1982:43). In his Course in General Linguistics, first published in 1916, de Saussure

Ejxenbaum describes Shlovski's essay on "Art as Device" as a kind of manifest of the Formal Methods.

[&]quot;On the connection between the devices of the syuzhet construction and general stylistic devices.

See also the discussion by Tony Bennett; Formalism and Marxism. London: Methuen, 1979:59-61.

argued that "languages are systems, constituted by signs that are arbitrary and differential" (Robey, 1982:39). The Prague School's emphasis on "structures", as an alternative to de Saussure's concept of relationships (ibid, 1982:44), led to it being described as "structuralist". They argued that, like language, the poetic work too is a "functional structure' ... the different elements of which cannot be understood except in their connections with the whole" (ibid, 1982:44).

The Prague school applied these ideas of "structure" and "function" to all forms of communication, not just to literature. In an address delivered in America in 1958 but based on categories propounded by Mukarovsky twenty years earlier, Jakobson suggested that any message can have six different functions, corresponding to the six factors present in any act of communication: an addresser, an addressee, a context, a code, a means of contact, and the message itself. These functions work in the following way:

The focus on the addresser, for instance a speaker or an author, constitutes the emotive function, that of expressing the addresser's attitudes or feelings; the focus on the addressee or receiver, the conative function, that of influencing the feelings or attitudes of the addressee; the focus on the context, the real, external situation in which the message occurs, the referential function; the focus on the code, as when the message elucidates a point of grammar, the metalingual function; the focus on the means of contact, as in the case, say, of expressions inserted by one party into a telephone conversation simply in order to reassure the other party that they are both still on the line, the phatic function; the focus on the message itself, the poetic function (ibid, 1982:44-45).

While all functions may be present within any act of communication, one will normally be dominant. This function will generate "an enhanced attention to the relationship between that level and all the others" and thus "foregrounds or actualises the text in its totality" (Robey, 1982:45). For Translation Studies, Russian Formalism offers, above all, "a movement from a substantive way of thinking to a relational one" (Jameson, 1972:13).

Peter Steiner defines "the dominant" as "a skeletal, form-giving element in a static hierarchy of holistic correlations": Russian Formalism, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1984:105. See also Jakobson's essay "The Dominant" in Readings in Russian Poetics, 1971:82-87.

POLYSYSTEM THEORY (ITAMAR EVEN-ZOHAR)

Even-Zohar has stated that" "Polysystem theory was suggested in my works in 1969 and 1970, subsequently reformulated in a number of my later studies and (I hope) improved, then shared, advanced, enlarged, and experimented with by a number of scholars in various countries" Its foundations had been "solidly laid" by the Russian Formalism of the 1920s (page 1)¹⁰⁹, especially in its later transformation "from an a-historical, clearly textocentric, approach to one where above-the-text occurrences are considered to be the *main* factor, and *change* is considered a built-in feature of 'the system' rather than 'an external force'" (33).

The main ideas of Polysystem Theory can be logically set out as follows:

- (1) The term "<u>literary</u>" refers to "any kind of textually manifested (or manifestable) semiotic repertoire fully and visibly institutionalised in society" (61, n.6). Literature is both autonomous, self-regulated, and heteronomous, conditioned by other systems (30).
- (2) A "system" is "the network of relations that can be hypothesized for a certain set of assumed observables" 11. A "literary system" is "the assumed set of observables supposed to be governed by a network of relations (i.e., for which systemic relations can be hypothesized), and which in view of the hypothesized nature of these relations we propose to call 'literary'" (27). Alternatively: "The network of relations that is hypothesized to obtain between a number of activities called 'literary' and consequently these activities themselves observed via that network" (28). "THE literary system does not 'exist' outside the relations contended to operate for/in it" (28).
- (3) Following Jakobson (above), the factors involved with the literary (poly)system are: (a) The producer (addresser, the writer), who makes texts, as both a "conditioning" and a "conditioned" force (35). (b) The

Read "Introduction to Polysystem Studies" in Poetics Today, vol. 11, no. 1, 1990:1. This journal includes 19 articles by Even-Zohar, published between 1974 and 1990, and "replaces" his earlier Papers in Historical Poetics (1978). Page references will subsequently be included in brackets in the main text.

Interestingly, Russian literature held the position of major prestige in "the Hebrew literary polysystem" between the two wars (49), and continued to do so long afterwards (83).

In his essay "On Literary Evolution" (1927), Tynjanov defines "the system" as "a complex whole, characterized by interrelatedness and dynamic tension between individual components, and held together by the underlying unity of the aesthetic function": see Erlich: Russian Formalism, 1969:199.

consumer (addressee, reader or listener), who "consumes" the text, but also engages in a wider range of activities relating to literature as part of "the public" (36-37). (c) The institution (context), which "governs the norms prevailing in this activity ... remunerates and reprimands producers and agents ... determines who, and which products will be remembered by a community for a longer period of time". The institution includes critics, publishing houses, periodicals, clubs, groups of writers, government bodies, educational institutions, the mass media, and more (37). The literary institution is "not unified" (38). (d) The repertoire (code), which is "the aggregate of rules and materials which govern both the making and the use of any given product" (39). In traditional linguistic terms, the repertoire is "a combination of 'grammar' and 'lexicon' of a given 'language'" (39). The "literary repertoire" is "the aggregate of rules and items with which a specific text is produced, and understood", but it may also include "the shared knowledge necessary for producing (and Understanding) various other products of the literary system", such as the roles of 'writer', 'reader', 'literary agent', etc. (40). Repertoires are structured on at least three levels (40-41). (e) The market (contact, channel), which is "the aggregate of factors involved with the selling and buying of literary products and with the promotion of types of consumption" (38). And, finally: (f) The product (message), which is "any performed (or performable) set of signs, i.e., including a given 'behaviour'" (43).

- A "polysystem" is "a multiple system, a system of various systems (4) which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent" (11). Polysystems are "dynamic" and heterogeneous (12). They are "not equal, but hierarchized" (14), and "It is the victory of one stratum over another which constitutes change on the diachronic axis" (14). At the centre of each particular system is "the most prestigious canonized repertoire" (17). Change commonly comes from "the periphery" to the center, within systems and sometimes across systems (14).
- (5) Literary systems are always in contact with other literary systems — Even-Zohar's words are: "Literatures are never in non-interference" (59). Sometimes this "interference" is "direct": "a source literature is

available to, and accessed by, agents of the target literature without intermediaries". Sometimes it is "indirect": "interference is intermediated through some channel such as translation" — a "set of translated texts" (57).

Translated literature plays a particular role within the literary polysystem. The selection of which texts are translated depends on "the home co-systems of the target literature" (46) – prestige and dominance are important elements in this process (59). The home co-systems of the target literature also determine "the way they adopt specific norms, behaviours and policies – in short, their use of the literary repertoire" (46) — "an appropriated repertoire does not necessarily maintain source literature functions" and, further, "appropriation tends to be simplified, regularized, schematized" (59).

Translated texts may have a central position in the literary polysystem, and may sometimes even be "the most active system within it" (46). This happens when a polysystem is still being established; when the literature is peripheral within a group of co-related literatures, or weak, or both; and when there are "turning points, crises or literary vacuums within the literature (47-48). Translated texts may also be "peripheral", in which case their function is largely conservative (49)¹². However, because "translated literature is itself stratified ... one section of translated literature may assume a central position, [while] another may remain quite peripheral" (49).

Even-Zohar himself notes that his major hypotheses "have won some support among a relatively large group of students of translation" (74, n.1). His own studies relate to Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish and "the emergence of a native Hebrew culture in Palestine" (chapters 9-15 of polysystem Studies) and, more recently, "The Role of Literature in the Making of the Nations of Europe"¹³. His ideas have also been considered to be compatible with certain contemporary sociological approaches to literature Dimic and Garstin, 1988:178).

Not all scholars are impressed. Anthony Pym, for example, suspects that "much of translation history can advance quite well without using the

Peter Bush notes, for example, that only three per cent of what is published in English is translated work: see Introduction of Rimbaud's Rainbow, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1998-1

See Applied Semiotics/Semiotique appliquee, no. 1, March 1996:20-30. Available on line at http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/paper/rol_lit.html

word 'system' at all" (Pym, 1998:117). He finds that the systems postulated are ultimately vague; they rely on "leaps of faith"; they "suppress a humanized, subjective systematicity"; and that, while system theories in general aim to be "scientific", they are "not very good ... at formulating causal hypotheses" or, equally important, in putting forward ethical propositions (ibid, 1998:116-124).

Edwin Gentzler, while acknowledging "the advances" made by Even-Zohar, also notes four "minor problems" with Polysystem theory. These are: a "tendency to propose universals based on very little evidence"; an "uncritical adoption of the Formalist framework" and some of its concepts (including "literariness", and definitions of "primary" and "secondary" literatures) which "underlie, yet seem inappropriate to ... [his] complex model of cultural systems"; "the problem of locating the referent"; and, finally, "Even-Zohar's own methodology and discourse", with its assumed scientific objectivity and assumptions of total completeness (cited in Munday, 2001:111).

DESCRIPTIVE TRANSLATION STUDIES (GIDEON TURY)

Polysystem theories provide a fruitful framework for thinking about the field of literature and the place of translated texts within and between literatures. Description Translation Studies provides a more defined methodology for comparative work.

Gentzler notes that Toury's work develops out of "the translation component of Even-Zohar's model" and can be divided into two phases. The first, from 1972-6 involved an extensive study of the cultural conditions governing the translation of foreign language novels into Hebrew from 1930 to 1945. This work was "begun with Itamar Even-Zohar and used the polysystem theory framework" The second period extended from 1975-1980 and led to a series of papers published in 1980 as *In Search of a Theory of Translation* 15. Gentzler suggests that "the second study, although still based on polysystem theory, posits theoretical hypotheses which distinguish Toury's model from that of his predecessor" (2001:123-124). Toury himself describes *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, published in 1995,

Read Translation Norms and Literary Translation into Hebrew, 1930-45 (in Hebrew), Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv 1977. Gentzler describes the work on pages 124-5.

Refer to Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv 1980.

as "not just a sequel to, but actually a replacement of" the earlier book. My comments here will focus on this newer book.

Toury argues that Translation Studies is a science, which through empirical research aims "to describe particular phenomena in the world of our experience and to establish general principles by means of which they can be explained and predicted"¹⁷. In accordance with James Holmes¹⁸, he therefore divides Translation Studies into two major branches, "Pure" and "Applied", and then sub-divides the "Pure" into two further sub-branches: "Theoretical" and "Descriptive" Translation Studies. Descriptive Translation Studies (henceforth DTS) is then further divided into three different "foci of research": Function-, Process- and Product-oriented (9-10). These three foci delimit separate legitimate fields of study, giving rise to individual studies which are "local activities, pertinent to a certain corpus, problem, historical period, or the like". But they are also interdependent, as "function, process and product can and do determine each other" (11). As Toury suggests, "the (prospective) systemic position and function of a translation determines its appropriate surface realisation (= textual-linguistic make-up) [which] governs the strategies whereby a target text (or parts thereof) is derived from its original, and hence the relationships which hold them together" (13)19. Finally, Descriptive Studies should be informed by, and contribute to, Theoretical Studies, in particular by a concern to establish "coherent laws which would state the inherent relations between all the variables found to be relevant to translation" (16).

Contrary to much of Applied Translation Studies, which is prescriptively oriented towards source texts, Toury (more than Even-Zohar) sees translations as "facts of the culture which hosts them, with the concomitant assumption that whatever their function and identity, they are constituted

Read John Benjamins, Amsterdam, p. 139. Further references to this book will be carried within my main text. Gentzler agrees with Theo Herman's critical comments on the lack of innovation in the new book and its lack of engagement with competing ideas and views: Translation in Systems, Manchester: St Jerome, 1999:14.

¹⁷ Citing Carl Hempel (9, fn. 3).

See "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies", republished in James Holmes: Translated. Amsterdam:Rodopi, 1988:67-80.

The relations may also be read in the opposite order, but as functions – "the value assigned to an item belonging in a certain system by virtue of the network of relations it enters into" (12, n.6) – have "at least logical priority over their surface realisation", the reversal of roles is "no longer viable: Since translating is a teleological activity by its very nature, its systemic position, and that of its future products, should be taken as forming constraints of the highest order" (14).

within that same culture and reflect its own constellation" (24). Nevertheless, because they are translations, they also tend to "deviate" from the target culture's sanctioned patterns, and such deviations are not only considered "justifiable, or even acceptable, but as actually preferable to complete normality" (29)²⁰. Toury formulates these assumptions to read: "translations are facts of target cultures; on occasion facts of special status, sometimes even constituting identifiable (sub)systems of their own, but of the target culture in any event" (29)²¹.

Such a formulation requires to be "contextualised" to be fully useful in a research project (29). This implies three postulates: (1) that there is a source-text, "in another culture/language, which has both chronological and logical priority over it ... which is presumed to have served as a departure point and basis for the latter" (33-4); (2) an assumption about transfer from the source-text, involving "knowledge about products, on the one hand, and about (cross-linguistic and cross-cultural) processes, on the other" (34); and (3) an assumption that there are "accountable relationships" which tie the translation to the source-text (35). DTS begins with the target-text, assuming it to be a translation of a particular source-text; maps "the assumed translation onto the assumed counterpart, in an attempt to determine the (uni-directional, irreversible) relationships which obtain between the paired texts; and then seeks to understand "the concept of translation underlying the text as a whole". This may further lead to other speculations, including "a confrontation of the competing models and norms of the target and source texts and systems, which were responsible for the establishment of the individual replacing and replaced segments, along with the relationships shown to obtain between them" (37). The full corpus of study for proper cultural explanations extends beyond one translation or pair of texts to, for example, a particular translator, school of translators, period, text-type, text-linguistic phenomena, etc. (38).

The "epitome" of the target-oriented approach is the establishment of "translational norms" (53). In general, norms are translations of general values and ideas of society, about right and wrong, suitable and unsuitable, into "performance instructions" for particular situations, specifying what behaviour is permitted, what forbidden, and what sits somewhere in between. Norms are the product of socialisation. They carry rewards and sanctions.

Compare this with Lawrence Venuti's discussion of The Translator's Invisibility.

London:Routledge, 1999.

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Toury also argues that "translatorship" amounts to the fulfilment of "a social role", in a way which is "deemed appropriate" by the target community (53).

They are used to evaluate behaviour (54-5). Within translation, there are always two sets of norms, that of the source text, "which determines the translation's adequacy as compared to the source text", and that of the target culture, which "determines its acceptability" (56-7). The "initial norm" facing the translator is whether to subject oneself to the source of target culture norms. (56-7).

Following this choice, Toury suggests there are two larger groups of norms with which the translator must deal. The first are "preliminary norms' relating to the choice of text to be translated and the directness of translation. The second are "operational norms" which direct the decisions being made during the work of translation. These include "matricial norms" governing the existence of target-language material, its distribution and manipulations of segmentation; as well as "textual-linguistic norms" which "govern the selection of material to formulate the target text in, or replace the original textual and linguistic material with". Textual-linguistic norms may be general, applying to translation as such, or particular, applying to "a particular text-type and/or mode of translation only" (59). Significantly, norms "determine the (type and extent of) equivalence manifested by actual translations" (61).

Norms can be reconstructed on the basis of the texts themselves, or from extra-textual sources such as prescriptive 'theories of translation; statements by translators, editors, publishers, publishers and other relevant individuals; critical discussions of translated works; the activities of individuals and groups of translators, etc. Toury suggests that textual norms are more to be trusted than extra-textual pronouncements (65). Finally, although norms are socio-culturally specific, they are also unstable (62), and are not always following absolutely (67-9).

Toury's theories move in a narrower and more carefully defined area than Even-Zohar's. (Interestingly the words "polysystem", and even "system", are not listed in the index to *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 1995.) Although similarly committed to a positivist scientific methodology, Toury's work is more accessible and more rigorously textual. Despite Hermans' quibbles with the terms "adequacy" and "equivalence" (which play only a small part in Toury's theory and are surely open to various definitions by their respective communities) (Hermans, 1999:76-77), Toury's work has been widely used in Translation Studies, despite its "theoretical contradictions", Gentzler suggests (ibid, 1999:130). A major reason for this is the large number of articulations which are possible between Toury's ideas and those of contemporary thought.

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Toury's papers have been published in the context of "manipulation theory"²² and the wider study of "translation and norms"²³. His rejection of "one-to-one notions of correspondence as well as the possibility of literary/linguistic equivalence - unless by accident" (Gentzler, 2001:131) matches the continuing dominance of de Saussure's thought characteristic of post-structuralism. His "destabilization of the notion of an original message with a fixed identity" (ibid, 2001:131) has strong resonances with Reader Response theories, and, in Translation Studies, with Skopos theory²⁴. Finally, his "integration of both the original text and the translated text in the semiotic web of intersecting cultural systems" (gentzler, 2001:131) responds with the turn to Cultural Studies which has been such a strong feature of Translation Studies, and the "new humanities" in general, at the close of the twentieth century²⁵. (In this case, both Even-Zohar and Toury are increasingly interested in "culture" and uninterested in "literature", it should also be admitted.)

CONCLUSION

Toury suggests that a theory provides a particular set of "questions", a number of "possible methods for dealing with an objects of study with an eye to those questions", and some of sense of "the kind of answers which would count as admissible" (23). Both he and Even-Zohar have played major roles in reshaping Translation Studies into a more rigorous and descriptive discipline, related not only to language studies but also to the major trends in European thought from Russian Formalism through to postmodernism.

Gideon Toury entitled his closing remarks to the Seminar at Aston University in February 1998 which led to the volume *Translation and Norms*: "Some of us are finally talking to each other. Would it mark the beginning of a true dialogue?" (Schaftner, 1999:133) He described the discussion which had taken place as: "A promising first step towards a much desired dialogue to be sure, but not yet a real dialogue." What seemed important to him for that dialogue to truly begin was "the ability – and the willingness – to take a

[&]quot;A Rationale for Descriptive Translation Studies" first appeared in Theo Hermans (ed.): The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation. London: Croom-Helm, 1985:16-41.

See "A Handful of Paragraphs on 'Translation' and 'Norms". In Translation and Norms, Edited by Christina Schaffner, Clevedon 1998:10-32.

See Christiane Nord: Translation as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained. Manchester: St Jerome, 1997.

See Lawrence Venuti: The Translation Studies Reader . London:Routledge, 2000:333.

step backwards and find out what everybody's assumptions and goals really are and how exactly different goals breed different theoretical and methodological stances" (ibid, 1999:133). This is precisely the purpose of Translation Theory.

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