

# **Psychological Approaches To Translation. A Brief Historical Outline**

**Daniela HĂISAN**

“Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, Romania

## **Abstract**

The article offers a brief historical outline of a particular research trend in Translation Studies focusing on various psychological aspects of translation. Drawing heavily on linguistics, but also closely akin to sociological studies, the psychology of translation brings to the fore not only the translator, but also other translation agents, the text, the process of translation, the reader etc. – in other words, most of the key elements defining translation. A shift of focus can be identified from a strictly behavioural analysis of translation towards an in-depth investigation of the all-pervasive emotion / subjectivity which affects all kinds of decision-making or problem-solving behaviours in the field of translation.

**Keywords:** translation (studies), psychology, sociology, subjectivity, emotion

As interdisciplinary a field as Translation Studies will never cease expanding its range of interest while also renewing itself with each new angle one might use to scrutinise its depths; with each “turn”, it offers us, much like a kaleidoscope, an ever-changing view of the facts. The recent history of Translation Studies has taught us a lot by means of paradigm shifts: chronologically, the linguistic turn, the functionalist turn, the descriptive turn, the cultural turn, and, of late, the soci(ologic)al and psychological turn, have all been nourished by (in)formal alliances with other (more or less related) disciplines.

If Socio-Translation Studies (or Sociology of Translation) aims at integrating human, sociological and cultural factors into the analysis of translated texts, a Psychology of Translation delves even deeper into the “human” side of translation. Along time, various works touched upon various psychological aspects related to translation, but never systematically. Jiří Levý’s famous 1967 model, which prompts us to look at translation as problem-solving, did include the psychological aspects of the translation process (especially as implied in the “minimax principle”), but not in much detail. For quite a long time, the contributions of psychology to the development of translation theory were confined to technical, cognitive aspects such as information procession or association, either in first language acquisition or in second language learning. Later on, in 1972, in the official “birth certificate” James S. Holmes devised for Translation Studies, *psychology of translation* is envisioned as a process-oriented branch of Descriptive Translation Studies, meant to carry out research dealing with the process or act of translation itself.

In 1975, David Gerver publishes in *Meta. Journal des traducteurs* (vol. 20, no. 2), an article entitled “A Psychological Approach to Simultaneous Interpretation”, which inspires Deborah A. Garretson to echo it in her “A Psychological Approach to Consecutive Interpretation”, also published in *Meta* in 1981. Three years later, an entire issue of this academic journal, guest edited by Jean-Luc Nespoulous, would be dedicated to *Cerveau, langage et traduction* [Brain, Language and Translation].

In an extensive paper published in 2002 (*On Psychological Aspects of Translation*), Bruno Osimo presents a useful report on the state of play: he underlines the fact that, if traditional psycholinguistic approaches to translation focused on a strictly behavioural analysis of translation, a change took place at

some point from psycholinguistics to psycho-semio-linguistics, with an important shift of focus from objectivity to subjectivity, from behavioral psychology to depth psychology, from linguistics to semiotics. Psychology applied to translation, he implies, should not be restricted to the study of, say, translator automatism, but also to the study of the last stages of the translation process (self-correction, revision etc.), thus making an essential contribution to translation science.

In “Toil, Trouble and *Jouissance*: A Case-Study – Editing *Juan the Landless*” (2012), Peter Bush highlights several instances of tense relationships between translators and editors, thus accounting for the level of emotional and intellectual commitment of translators to their work. A conjugated, socio-psychological approach to translation seems to have already given rise to a fascinating line of research focusing on translators and their intrinsic subjectivity (see Robinson’s somatics, 1991; Skibińska, 2002 etc.). *Francontraste. L’affectivité et la subjectivité dans le langage*, a volume edited by Bogdanka Pavelin Lešić in 2013, contains an entire section on subjectivity in translation (mostly based on translations from French into Slovenian, Croatian and Romanian), whereas Raluca-Nicoleta Balașchi’s *Subjectivité du traduire* (2013) is entirely dedicated to this issue of subjectivity. It is here that the reputed translation critic Lance Hewson (2013: 13) praises subjectivity for both its unlimited potential for creativity and the dangers it embodies (the temptation to outdo the ST author by indulging in original writing, or by simply allowing oneself to translate mechanically or lazily). The nuances of subjectivity in translations in various languages (Russian, Romanian, Greek etc.) of works by Gustave Flaubert, Proust, Herta Müller, Romain Gary, Virginia Woolf, Andrei Makine etc. are perfected by a series of observations on self-

translation (see Gancevici, “(Auto)traduction et subjectivité chez Matéi Visniec”, 2013: 43-61).

Akbar Dehghan Ferdows’s 2014 *Psychological Approach to Translation* is among the first single-author works to systematically address psychological aspects in translation. As a matter of fact, his book, bearing an illuminating subtitle (*A Study of Translation as Process and the Phenomenon of Recalling TL Equivalents*) does more than this: it also brings along his own didactic expertise (*i.e.* the results of eight years of teaching translation by correspondence), thus thoroughly enriching his approach. His is clearly a pedagogically applicable psychological study of translation. Thus, he not only provides an update on translation from a linguistic (Part Two) and a psycholinguistic perspective (Part Three), but also emphasizes the pedagogical implications of being aware of certain psychological aspects of translation, not to mention the fact that he lists, in Part Six, fourteen practical steps to be taken in the process of translation, as a sort of quick reference for both translators and students (*i.e.* Message Analysis; Structure Analysis; Looking Up Meanings; Looking Up New Meanings; Looking Up Figurative Meanings; Eliciting Meaning from Structure; Studying the Style; Studying the Cohesion and Coherence; The Role of Pronunciation and Intonation; Watching for Linguistic Interference; Shifts in Translation; Breaking and Joining Sentences; Final Touches; Trimming and Decorating).

The hypothesis of this study is that there is a direct relationship between extensive reading in the target language (TL) and one’s translating ability – even if (or all the more so if) the TL happens to be the translator’s mother tongue. The key words are *remembering*, *equivalent* and *reading*. Remembering may be affected by a wide range of idiosyncratic, physiological, genetic, neurolinguistic, psychic factors, but it can also be made more

efficient. According to Dehghan Ferdows, translators will never be able to provide appropriate translation equivalents unless they have personally experienced a tremendous variety of TL structures and idioms through extensive exposure to them. When he advocates for extensive reading in the T, he actually advocates for including systematic TL-text reading as compulsory in any formal or informal translator training curriculum. This will help translators better remember natural TL structures when translating.

Another paper conjugating pedagogy, psychology and translation is signed by Mihaela Cozma and Daniel Dejica-Cartis (*A Psychological Approach to Professional Translator Education*), which starts from the assumption that the efficiency of translator training is determined not only by social, economic, pedagogical, organizational factors, but also by a variety of psychological factors.

Last but definitely not least, Séverine Hubscher-Davidson's remarkable work published in 2018, *Translation and Emotion. A Psychological Perspective*, offers one of the most coherent approaches to the psychology of translation. Dealing with the psychological construct of emotion, the book identifies and analyses the three main areas where emotions influence translators: first, emotional content of the source texts they are supposed to translate; then, their own emotions; finally, the emotions of source and target readers. Each chapter focuses on a different emotion trait: emotion perception, emotion regulation, and emotion expression, thus shedding light on the impact emotions have on the translators' choices. The book draws on translators' accounts of their experiences, as well as on a case study of emotional intelligence involving 155 professional translators. It also draws attention to another burning issue (equally forceful in Socio-Translation Studies), namely the

translator's voice: "Traditionally muted, self-effacing and non-interfering, translators' voices have recently become louder, persistent, and sometimes unsettling." (Hubscher-Davidson, 2018: 2).

As a conclusion, *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature*, an academic journal from Poland, has a special issue on *Translating Emotions* in the making. The University of Western Brittany, France, will host next year in March a series of debates on *Traduction et sentiment* [Translation and Sentiment]. The history continues...

### **Bibliography:**

- BALAȚCHI, R.-N. (ed.) (2013): *Subjectivité du traduire* (Actes de la Table Ronde à Participation Internationale *Subjectivité et traduction*, Suceava, le 30 mai 2013), *Atelier de traduction hors-série*, Editura Universității Suceava
- BUSH, P. (2012): "Toil, Trouble and *Jouissance*: A Case-Study—Editing *Juan the Landless*", in Rita Wilson and Leah Gerber (eds.), *Creative Constraints: Translation and Authorship*, Clayton, VIC, Monash University Publishing, pp. 119–131
- COZMA, M.; Dejica-Cartis, D. (2013): *A Psychological Approach to Professional Translator Education*, in *Procedia. Social and Behavioral Sciences* no. 84, pp. 895-899
- DEGHAN FERDOWS, A. (2014): *A Psychological Approach to Translation*, Xlibris
- GANCEVICI, O. (2013): "(Auto)traduction et subjectivité chez Matéi Visniec", in *Subjectivité du traduire* (Actes de la Table Ronde à Participation Internationale *Subjectivité et*

- traduction*, Suceava, le 30 mai 2013), *Atelier de traduction hors-série*, Editura Universității Suceava, pp. 43-61
- GARRETSON, D. A. (1981): “A Psychological Approach to Consecutive Interpretation”, in *Meta. Journal des traducteurs*, volume 26, no. 3, pp. 244-254
- GERVER, D. (1975): “A Psychological Approach to Simultaneous Interpretation”, in *Meta. Journal des traducteurs*, volume 20, no. 2, pp. 119-128
- HEWSON, L. (2013): “Éloge de la subjectivité”, in *Atelier de traduction hors série (Subjectivité du traduire, Actes de la Table Ronde à participation international Subjectivité et traduction*, Suceava, le 30 mai 2013), *Atelier de traduction hors-série*, Editura Universității Suceava, pp. 13-29
- HOLMES, J. S. (1988): “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies”, in James S. Holmes (ed.), *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, pp. 67-80
- HUBSCHER-DAVIDSON, S. (2018): *Translation and Emotion. A Psychological Perspective*, London & New York, Routledge
- LEVÝ, J. (1967): “Translation as a Decision Process”, in *To Honor Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, vol. 2, The Hague, Mouton, pp. 1171-1182
- OSIMO, B. (2002): “On Psychological Aspects of Translation”, in *Sign Systems Studies* 30 (2), pp. 607-662
- PAVELIN LEŠIĆ, B. (ed.) (2013): *Francontraste. L’affektivité et la subjectivité dans le langage*, Mons, CIPA
- ROBINSON, D. (1991): *The Translator’s Turn*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press
- SKIBIŃSKA, E. (2002): *La retraduction, manifestation de la subjectivité du traducteur*,

<http://webs2002.uab.es/doletiana/1Documents/1Skibinska.pdf> (January 2010)