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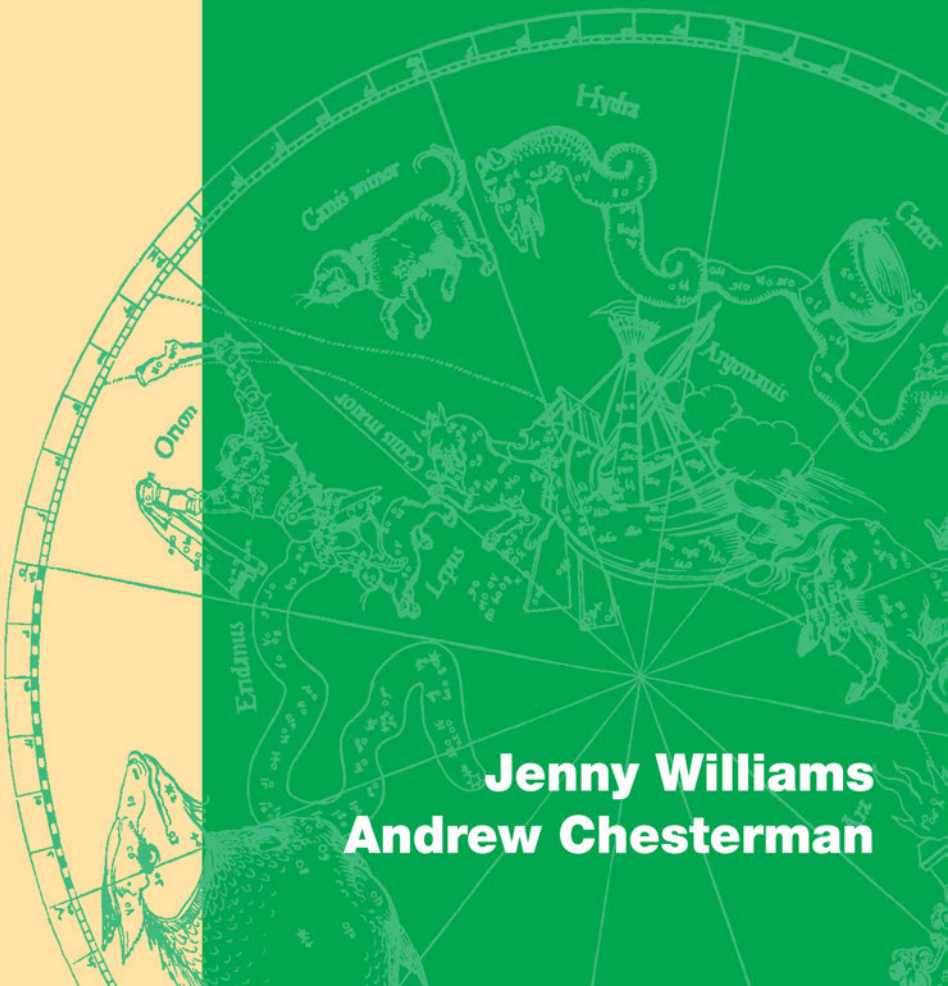
THE MAP

A Beginner's Guide to Doing Research in Translation Studies



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A Beginner's Guide to Doing Research in Translation Studies

by

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Introduction

This book is intended as a guide for students who are required to undertake research in Translation Studies and present it in written and/or oral form. It is not an introduction to Translation Studies as such; we assume that readers already have a basic familiarity with the field. **The Map** aims to provide a step-by-step introduction to *doing research* in an area which, because of its interdisciplinary nature, can present the inexperienced researcher with a bewildering array of topics and methodologies. We have called it **The Map** because it is designed to help you find your way through a relatively new and uncharted terrain.

The point in an academic career at which a student engages in Translation Studies research for the first time varies from country to country. As an introductory text, **The Map** is addressed primarily to advanced BA students, to MA/MSc/MPhil students – whether on taught or research Masters programmes – as well as to PhD students who have had little previous experience of research in Translation Studies. We use these academic qualifications in the knowledge that they are culture-specific and with the intention only of indicating general levels of achievement.

Let us assume that a translation is a text in one language which is produced on the basis of a text in another language for a particular purpose. In the context of **The Map,** 'Translation Studies' is defined as the field of study devoted to describing, analyzing and theorizing the processes, contexts and products of the act of translation as well as the (roles of the) agents involved. In Chapter 1 we discuss research in Translation Studies under the following headings: Text Analysis and Translation, Translation Quality Assessment, Genre Translation, Multimedia Translation, Translation and Technology, Translation History, Translation Ethics, Terminology and Glossaries, Interpreting, the Translation Process, Translator Training and the Translation Profession.

We define research broadly as a "systematic investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge" (Chambers 1989:845). We agree with Gillham (2000a: 2) that "research is about creating new knowledge, whatever the disciplines". Innovation is vital if a discipline is to grow and prosper. However, the definition of 'new

knowledge' will vary according to the level at which the research is undertaken. An essay at advanced BA level will clearly differ in scope from a doctoral dissertation. 'Creating new knowledge' can consist in summarizing new research in an emerging field or providing a very small amount of new evidence to support or disconfirm an existing hypothesis at one end of the scale, to developing a new methodology for Translation History at the other.

The aim of Translation Studies research is therefore to make a contribution to the field which increases the sum of our knowledge. You can make your contribution in a number of ways:

- By providing new data;
- By suggesting an answer to a specific question;
- By testing or refining an existing hypothesis, theory or methodology;
- By proposing a new idea, hypothesis, theory or methodology.

Before you embark on research it is essential that you have some practical experience of translating, whether in the translation classroom or in a professional setting. A researcher in Translation Studies with no experience of translating is rather like the stereotypical backseat driver who, as we know, ends up being not only unpopular but also ignored and thus ineffectual – and sometimes even gets ejected from the vehicle! It is difficult, if not impossible, to appreciate the thought processes, choices, constraints and mechanisms involved in translation if you have never engaged in the process yourself. Theory and practice are as inseparable in Translation Studies as they are in all other fields of human endeavour. The mutual suspicion and hostility which used to exist between the translation profession and the Translation Studies research community has been giving way in recent times to a more productive relationship. The action research model recently proposed by Hatim (2001) offers some solutions to overcoming this unhelpful division. (See also Chesterman and Wagner 2002.)

Whether your desire to undertake research in Translation Studies is determined by a natural curiosity, a need to obtain a further qualification or a general desire for personal development, one of the first steps you will need to take is to identify a general area which interests you. Personal interest in and enthusiasm for your

subject are vital if you want to make a success of it.

You might be interested in increasing our general understanding of translation or in improving some aspect of translation practice. The first kind of investigation might lead to better theories, better ways of looking at translation. The second would aim at improving translation quality or perhaps raising the status of translators themselves. Applied research of this kind can offer guidelines for better practice based on the study of successful professional translation. It can also test and perhaps revise prescriptive claims in the light of evidence from competent professional practice.

The initial idea for a research project can come from a very wide variety of sources, both academic and non-academic. You might be inspired by a book or a lecture on some aspect of Translation Studies, or by the work of a fellow student. You might be reading *Harry Potter* and wonder how it could be translated into Chinese. Or you could be trying to assemble your new flatpack bookcase and wonder how the largely incomprehensible instructions were produced. Or you could be playing your new video game and wondering who translated the original Japanese soundtrack into English. Or you could simply wake up one morning and wonder how all those European Union directives on Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy got translated into the languages of the member states – or, indeed, ponder the implications of the enlargement of the European Union for translation.

The initial idea is exciting – but perhaps someone has already researched it? Or perhaps it's not feasible? Or perhaps it's not worth researching? To answer these questions you need to ascertain the current state of research in the field.

There are two reasons why this is essential:

1. The purpose of research is to *add* to the sum of knowledge; reinventing the wheel is a waste of everyone's time.
2. Your research is not taking place in a vacuum: it relates to what has gone before. Even if you consider that everything written on your topic to date is rubbish you must be able to substantiate this opinion and justify your own approach.

Research in Translation Studies can only grow and prosper if hypotheses are constantly being refined, developed and built upon, if ideas are constantly scrutinized. This is why you must first establish the current state of research on the topic you want to investigate.

Whether you have an initial idea or not, the standard Translation Studies reference works such as the annual *Bibliography of Translation Studies* (Bowker *et al.* 1998; 1999 and 2000a), the biannual *Translation Studies Abstracts* (Olohan 1998-), the *Dictionary of Translation Studies* (Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997), the *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English* (Classe 2000) and the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker 1998) all provide a good starting point. Recent surveys of the field include Chesterman (1997) and Munday (2001).

Chapter 1 of **The Map** gives an overview of twelve research areas in Translation Studies which will help you to identify a topic and establish some of the current research questions relating to it. Chapter 2 will assist you in planning your research project: time spent drawing up your research plan is time well spent and can save you time and trouble in the long run. Chapters 3 to 7 provide some of the conceptual and methodological tools you will need. Chapters 8 and 9 are about how to present your research; and, finally, chapter 10 deals with some of the criteria which you and others will use to assess your research.

The Map will thus take you through the research process, which can be described as consisting of a number of stages, some of which will overlap:

- choosing an area
- making a preliminary plan
- searching through the literature
- reading and thinking
- defining the research question
- revising the plan
- collecting data
- analyzing the data
- processing the results
- writing a draft
- evaluating, eliciting feedback
- thinking of implications

- finalizing the text
- presenting your research report.

How you use **The Map** will depend on your current position and your destination. If you are at the beginning of your journey into research in Translation Studies, we suggest you read this book chronologically. If you are about to give an oral presentation, you might skip to Chapter 9. Students in the throes of writing up their research might find Chapter 8 particularly useful. If you are nearing completion of your project, the checklist in Chapter 10 might be the best place to start.

1. Areas in Translation Research

This chapter gives an overview of 12 research areas in Translation Studies. The list itself is by no means exhaustive nor is the coverage of each topic comprehensive. It is merely intended to provide a point of orientation – a **Map** – for researchers setting out to explore Translation Studies.

1.1 Text Analysis and Translation

Source Text Analysis

Source text analysis focuses on the analysis of the source text itself, examining the various aspects of it that might give rise to translation problems. This has an obvious relevance in translator training. A good primary background reference is Nord (1991). The point of such an analysis is to prepare for a translation: after a careful analysis of the syntactic, semantic and stylistic features of the source text, it will presumably be easier to come up with adequate translation solutions. This kind of focus is usually linked to an analysis of the communicative situation of the translation itself: who it will be for, what its function is intended to be, and so on.

Comparison of Translations and their Source Texts

The *analysis of translated texts* involves the textual comparison of a translation with its original. A *translation comparison* deals with several translations, into the same language or into different languages, of the same original. Such topics cannot deal with every possible aspect of the texts, of course, so you have to choose the aspect(s) you want to focus on. You might take a particular aspect of the source text, such as a particular stylistic or syntactic feature, and examine the corresponding sections in the translations. Or you could start with a kind of translation problem (the translation of passive sentences, or dialect, or allusions, for instance), and see how your translator(s) have solved the problem, what *translation strategies* they have used. Or you could start with a kind of translation strategy, some kind of change or shift between source and target texts (e.g. the strategy of explicitation), and examine its conditions

of use. (For references to research on explicitation, see e.g. the entry for it in Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997.) In all these cases, your aim would be to discover patterns of correspondence between the texts. In other words, you would be interested in possible regularities of the translator's behaviour, and maybe also in the general principles that seem to determine how certain things get translated under certain conditions. (See Leuven-Zwart 1989 and 1990 for a methodology for translation analysis.)

Comparison of Translations and Non-translated Texts

This kind of analysis compares translations into a given language with similar texts originally written in that language. Traditionally in Translation Studies scholars have referred to these as *parallel texts*; with the advent of corpus-based Translation Studies these original-language texts are now sometimes called *comparable texts*. The idea here is to examine the way in which translations tend to differ from other texts in the target language, the way they often turn out to be not quite natural. (This might, or might not, be a good thing – depending on the aim and type of the translation in question.) This kind of research is quantitative, and usually deals with relative differences of distribution of particular textual features. For some examples, see several of the papers in Olohan (2000) and the special issue of *Meta* 43(4) (1998).

All the above research areas involve forms of contrastive text analysis and contrastive stylistics. They thus depend implicitly on some kind of contrastive theory. (See Chesterman 1998 for the relation between the theories and methodologies of contrastive analysis and Translation Studies.)

Translation with Commentary

A *translation with commentary* (or *annotated translation*) is a form of introspective and retrospective research where you yourself translate a text and, at the same time, write a commentary on your own translation process. This commentary will include some discussion of the translation assignment, an analysis of aspects of the source text, and a reasoned justification of the kinds of solutions you arrived at for particular kinds of translation problems. One value of such research lies in the contribution that increased self-awareness

can make to translation quality. You might also want to show whether you have found any helpful guidelines for your translation decisions in what you have read in Translation Studies. A classical example of such a commentary is Bly (1984), where the translator describes in detail the various stages he went through during the translation of a poem.

1.2 Translation Quality Assessment

Translation quality assessment, unlike most of the areas mentioned here, is overtly evaluative. Translations are assessed in real life in several circumstances: during training, in examinations for official certification, by critics and reviewers, and ultimately of course by the ordinary reader. Some assessment methods have been developed by scholars, others by teachers, and still others by the translation industry. Some international standards have been set up in order to control or assure quality (ISO 9002, DIN 2345).

We can distinguish three general approaches to quality assessment. One is *source-oriented*, based on the relation between the translation and its source text. Assessment methods of this kind set up definitions of required equivalence and then classify various kinds of deviance from this equivalence. (See e.g. House 1997 and Schäffner 1998; the special issues of *TTR* 2(2) 1989, *The Translator* 6(2) 2000 and *Meta* 46(2) 2001.)

The second approach is *target-language oriented*. Here, the relation at stake is not with the source text but with the target language. Equivalence is not a central concept here. This approach uses text analysis (see above) in order to assess the differences between the translation in question and other comparable texts in the target language. The idea is to measure the translation's degree of naturalness – on the assumption that this is often a feature to be desired. (See Toury 1995 and Leuven-Zwart 1989 and 1990.)

The third approach has to do with the assessment of *translation effects* – on clients, teachers, critics and readers. In the case of a literary translation, you might examine published reviews in the press. (See e.g. Maier 1998 and Fawcett 2000.) Or you might interview publishers or readers about their expectations concerning translation quality. Or you might carry out comprehension tests on

the translation, to see how well people understood it. Or you might send out a questionnaire to translation teachers, to see what kinds of marking methods and criteria they used. This approach finds functional and/or communicative theories of translation useful, such as skopos theory, since the skopos is the 'purpose for which a translator designs a translation ("translatum") in agreement with his commissioner' (Vermeer 1996: 7).

All three general approaches are illustrated in chapter 5 of Chesterman (1997).

1.3 Genre Translation

By 'genre' we mean both traditional literary genres such as drama, poetry and prose fiction as well as other well established and clearly defined types of text for translation such as multimedia texts, religious texts, children's literature, tourism texts, technical texts and legal documents. See Swales (1991) and Trosborg (1997) for an overview of definitions and methodological concepts.

For a good introduction to the major issues in literary translation, see Bassnett (1991), Gaddis Rose (1997), Bassnett and Lefevere (1998) and Boase-Beier and Holman (1999).

Drama

The status of drama texts is a major issue here, and among the first questions to be addressed are: is this play being translated to be performed or to be read? If it is to be performed, what sort of translation is required – a rough one which will be a starting point for the production or a fully performable one or something in between? The process of translation 'from page to stage' throws up many research questions – for example, the role(s) of the various participants: translator, director, actors. There is plenty of scope for undertaking a case study of an individual production, researching the biography of an established drama translator, comparing different translations of the same play.

Other topics which suggest themselves include the question of (trans)location: (where) is the foreign play located in the target culture? Brecht has been located in the north-east of England and Chekov in the west of Ireland: what are the reasons for / implications