

A Science of the Times? Descriptive Translation Studies and History

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The theory of translation itself will have to be modified.

(Toury 1978: 83)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) set out to describe translations as they were done rather than to prescribe how they should be done. This meant a shift from a prescriptive or normative study of translation to descriptive, empirical, and historical translation research. The prescription and defense of particular norms, ideals, and models of translation was unmasked by DTS as an essentialist view on translation—a view oblivious to variation in history, blind to the fact that translations are always variable, subject to cultural and historical forces. To use the vocabulary of David Hume, DTS broke with normative approaches of *ought* and *ought not*, and proposed an approach focused on *is* and *is not*. The proposals of DTS shook up the field of translation research, with a lasting impact.

Gideon Toury is considered the main theorist of DTS (see, e.g., Lambert 2006 [1995]: 115; Hermans 1999: 35, 37, 40, 49). In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s he articulated with great conceptual rigor what it entailed precisely for Translation Studies (TS) to move—as linguistics had done—from a normative to a descriptive research approach, and around Toury's conceptual proposals (especially the concept of 'norms') gathered a group of young innovative scholars, among which José Lambert, Susan Bassnett, and Theo Hermans (see also below). This was a variegated group, to the extent that Anthony Pym (1998) framed the 'unity' of the group as 'an illusory effect' produced by the distant view of outside observers (14). Pym possibly overstates his case if he refers to the 1980s, as we will see, though he also understates it for the late 1990s and onward. As Toury gradually moved away from cultural and historical analysis in the mid-nineties, other group members (e.g., Hermans, Bassnett) held on to cultural and historical research yet shifted away from central ideas of DTS. This chapter will present a succinct history of descriptivist thinking about translation and history.

The first part of the chapter summarizes the main tenets of DTS, sketches its evolution and place within TS at large, and signals both its fundamental interest in history and its structuralist tendency to model humanistic research on the sciences. The second part intends to disentangle the complicated relation between DTS and 'history' (understood as a research object and a discipline). It identifies a number of claims concerning translation and history, and

signals to what extent they were defended by DTS only or mainly, or advanced by DTS and shared by others, or advanced by rivaling approaches as a critique of DTS. This discussion will throw light on the relative unity or internal diversity of DTS.

1. Descriptive Translation Studies: A game-changing paradigm

In the second half of the 1970s ‘the time’ was ‘ripe for a change of paradigms’ in translation research (words of Hermans quoted in Toury 1998: 13). In 1975 George Steiner stated that translation theories ‘pivoted monotonously’ around un- or ill-defined concepts (1998 [1975]: 290) and for Toury scholarly work had been ‘marred’ ‘ever since the sixties’ by ‘an overriding orientation towards practical applications’ (1995: 2). The scholarship targeted by Toury was prescriptive in the sense that its mission was ‘to tell others’, especially ignorant students and erring translators, ‘what they should have done’ in their translations, and also what they ‘should be doing’ in the future (19). ‘Back in the seventies’, most of these ‘application-ridden’ paradigms were ‘marked by extreme source-orientedness’ (24) as they mainly considered the degree of fidelity to the original work (or ‘source text’). Normative analysts time and again explained the kind of fidelity they wanted, and what was for them an adequate and equivalent translation. In the late seventies, Toury and his fellow travelers were still ‘young Turks’, with an eagerness to ‘make their mark’ (Hermans 1999: 12), a desire to define the problem—the marred field—and work toward a solution. ‘The theory of translation itself will have to be modified’, graduate student Gideon Toury proclaimed in the proceedings of the seminal 1976 Leuven Symposium on translation research (1978: 83).

Fast forward to 10 July 1995. Seated on a bench in the sunlit garden of the Leuven Faculty of Arts, Tel Aviv professor Gideon Toury was skimming through his hot off the press *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond* (1995). He looked serene and concentrated, I remember, as he took notes in preparation of his afternoon seminar at the CETRA Doctoral Summer School in TS. It was a matter of course that he had been invited to this Summer School by the Leuven comparatist José Lambert, CETRA’s mastermind with whom he had founded the journal *Target* in 1989. In 1995 things were running smoothly for these two leading figures of the descriptive approach to translation research. In twenty years time, their ideas had moved from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘center’ of TS, to use terms belonging to their scholarly vocabulary.

The title of Toury’s 1995 book contained the promise of an academic pioneer not just taking stock (*Descriptive Translation Studies*) but also looking for new horizons (*and beyond*). Toury furthermore framed his new book as ‘a replacement’ of *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, his ‘programmatic’ 1980 book that he refused to have reprinted despite ‘growing

pressure from colleagues and publishers alike' (1995: 3–4). Toury's 1995 monograph presented itself as a renewed attack on the state of the discipline, with a rhetoric less serene than suggested by Toury's posture in the Leuven garden. The rhetoric testified to the unbending ambition of a scholar who with Lambert and others had created and institutionalized a new 'descriptive/systemic/ manipulation paradigm' in TS (Hermans 1999: 11). Toury (1995) became a must-have research monograph in TS and has so far earned about 6,611 citations in Google Scholar (June 17, 2019), second only in its field to Lawrence Venuti's contemporary monograph *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995). Many DTS insights still have relevance today and Toury (1995) remains a foremost way to understand them.

At the same time, there was something peculiar about *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond*, already in 1995. Instead of assuming the new centrality of the descriptive paradigm, and hence engaging with new theories, the book stuck to its militant descriptivist argument of the 1970s and 1980s: it repeated that DTS opened doors to cultural research on translation; that TS would not become an academic discipline if it mainly engaged in normative practices such as training students to deliver 'good' translations; that TS should rather analyze actual translations for their sociocultural interest; that actual translations are facts about the culture that produces and uses them (that is, about the 'target system'); and that translations are key elements in cultural dynamics and power relations between cultures (1995: 23–9; see also below). Toury articulated his program forcefully in 1995, as he had done before. However, whereas in 1976 and 1980 his ideas indeed opened doors to new cultural and historical research, twenty years later those doors were in fact already wide open, and the new researchers who walked in were not always interested in DTS. Why should they have cared about an old revolution? And what were these ideas anyway?

1.1 Revolution: Look for norms—but keep a distance

In order to understand the role and place of DTS in TS we must sketch its paradigmatic evolution, institutionalization and diversification from the 1970s onward. Already in 1953, says Hermans, John McFarlane had called for a 'diagnostic rather than hortatory' approach to translation (quoted in Hermans 1999: 19), yet this cry remained unheard in the field of 'hortatory' (i.e., normative) translation theory. Only in the 1960s came a first 'meeting of minds', 'between the Amsterdam-based American translator and theorist James Holmes and a Czechoslovak group including Jiří Levý, Anton Popovič and František Miko' (1999: 11). Soon, contacts were also established with Tel Aviv researchers Itamar Even-Zohar and Toury, and with Flemish academics including Lambert, André Lefevere, and Raymond Van den Broeck

(see also Lambert 2006: 54). Levý (1963) prefigured Even-Zohar's and Toury's ideas when he argued that translations cater for cultural needs in certain periods. A 1968 paper by Holmes echoed McFarlane and prefigured Toury when it urged translation scholarship to 'lay aside prescription in favour of description' (Holmes 1988 [1968] quoted in Hermans 1999: 22, 28). Hermans (1999) excellently analyzes the emerging group of translation scholars in terms of an 'invisible college', Diana Crane's term for 'a communication network of a subgroup of researchers within a research area' (1972: 35). His account seems to qualify Pym's (1998) claim that the 'unity' of the group was produced by 'illusory' effects of distance.

While working on their PhD theses around 1970, Toury and Lambert independently felt that existing definitions of translation impeded their research, respectively on the literary 'translational behavior' into Hebrew in the period 1930–45 (Toury 1998: 12) and on the reception and translation of 'German Romanticism in France since 1800' (Lambert 2006 [1988]: 49). Both students found that standing definitions of translation were exclusionary and that the prevailing translation theories were unproductively evaluative. Both refused to exclude interesting texts from their corpora on grounds of such exclusionary definitions (Toury 1998: 12), and both found it analytically sterile to consider some kinds of translation 'right' and other kinds 'wrong' (Lambert 2006 [1988]: 51). Various sorts of Hebrew and French translations had been circulating, and they were all potentially interesting and even crucial for cultural and historical analysis and insight. In other words, graduate students Toury and Lambert faced a problem at the start, for they saw fascinating phenomena to which existent frameworks remained blind: contemporary translation research was normative and linguistic, not cultural and literary; literary research indulged in author worshipping and theory (Lambert 1997) and remained hostile to translations (Hermans 1999: 41–2).

For the young scholars who gathered at the 1976 Leuven Symposium the time was indeed ripe for a change. They all possessed 'a background in literary studies with an active interest in comparative literature and literary *history*' (12; my emphasis) and many saw themselves as 'radical, innovative, combative and theoretically sophisticated,' with 'the example of the Russian formalists never far away' (12–3). As a response to shared problems 'decisive theory formation' occurred at three conferences, in 1976 (Leuven), 1978 (Tel Aviv), and 1980 (Antwerp). Besides Toury, Even-Zohar, Lambert, Holmes, Lefevere and Van den Broeck, participants included such young researchers as Bassnett, Lieven D'hulst, Maria Tymoczko, and Hermans (12), who would all in their own way expand the paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s (13).

The normative view of translation as reverence for the source text began to make place for an empirical view of translation as a practice of the target culture. To that end Toury took up a ‘word’ already in use by his supervisor Even-Zohar and developed that word into an operational ‘notion’: *norms* (Toury 1998: 16–7). Toury argued that translations—even of a single source text—come in a great variety because translations are governed by norms, and different cultures comply to different norms, including different norms of translation. Notions of what constitutes a good translation are not universal but have always differed across time and space. Thus, we find different ‘preliminary’ norms of translation, that is, norms that govern the selection of texts to be translated and norms that tell if translations should be direct or may proceed from ‘mediating languages’. We will also find different ‘operational’ norms across space and time, i.e., norms that govern textual presentation (e.g., regarding language, ideology, or completeness vis-à-vis the source text) (Toury 1995: 58–9).

In his 1976 Leuven paper Toury defined *norms* as ‘the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community—as to what is right and wrong, adequate and inadequate—into specific performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to specific situations’ (1978: 83–4). Hermans later spelled out that norms are not usually explicit rules but rather social ‘correctness notions’ that are interiorized through socialization and

allow the translator who is faced with a contingent, unpredictable and potentially destabilizing input—the Source Text—to reduce the number of potential solutions for this array of translational problems by adopting only those solutions suggested by the norm as being likely to result in a Target Text that accords with a given model, and thus with a certain notion of correctness, and hence with the values and attitudes that lie behind these models and correctness notions. (Hermans 1991: 164–5)

Taking his cue from a paper by Dirk De Geest (1992), Toury (1995) further specified that these norms regulate ‘what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioural dimension’ (55). Though norms are often framed as a sociological notion, their historical dimension is no less manifest. To repeat, norms vary in place *and* time.

According to Toury’s view, the aim of academic research on translation was to study this variety of norms from a scholarly distance, without mingling with them, without proposing alternative sets of norms or defending the ones encountered. The purpose of DTS was to ‘describe’ the different sets of norms that govern translations in—and as part of—each sociocultural context. DTS would accept as its object of study (i.e., as a translation) any text

that had at some point been considered a translation, or had functioned as a translation, in a certain culture (called the ‘target’, receiving or translating culture). Translation research began to look for ‘regularities’ in these texts so as to extract from these regularities a set of governing translational norms, which ‘emerge as explanatory hypotheses’ of regularities but also of variety, since different sets of norms exist in different times and places and may even coexist and compete in one place (1998: 16–7). The notion of norms was a cornerstone of a new approach that in the late–1970s and 1980s ‘caus[ed] several established scholars to change their initial positions according to the so-called new paradigm’ (Lambert 2006 [1991]: 76). ‘I (...) found myself preaching’, Toury (1998) said about that period, ‘to people who were basically on the verge of conversion to a sociocultural way of thinking about translation anyway’ (13). Yet was anybody else in academia interested in this kind of translation research?

1.2 Legitimization: Look for systems—they make translation big

Descriptivists are not supposed to identify with norms. They are not meant to decide if a text qualifies (or not) as a translation according to one or another norm they may like or dislike. From a descriptive perspective, a translation is any text or ‘any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on whatever grounds’ (Toury 1985: 20). A translation is what counts or counted as a translation at some point in some period. Whenever a culture treats certain texts or utterances as translations, whenever its members agree to count certain texts as translations, whenever they ‘assume’ that certain texts are translations, DTS will have a potential interest in these ‘assumed translations’ (Toury 1995: 32).

The concept of assumed translation is meant to be non-normative and non-exclusionary. It serves to include not only unquestionable, prototypical translations but also what more normative analysts might call an ‘adaptation’ (though for others it counts or counted as a translation), or a ‘pseudotranslation’ (at some time assumed to be an authentic translation) (1995: 40–52), or an ‘indirect translation’ (e.g., a Spanish translation of a French translation of a Norwegian original), which tells us much about forms of contact between cultures and is therefore not ‘some kind of disease to be shunned’ by scholars (127). A scholar’s particular normative sense of ‘equivalence’ can no longer be the criterion to decide *if* a text is a translation. For DTS, equivalence is an open value—it is whatever made a culture assume *that* a text was a translation. The specific assumptions of a culture were translational facts produced—sanctioned, instituted—by that culture and hence facts that very much characterized that culture.

‘That changed everything’, Pym points out (2014: 63). By working with assumed translations, DTS managed to move away from invariantly sterile normative debates, which

asked whether a certain text *t* ‘is’ a translation (given certain normative standards about what a translation should look like); or whether it ‘is’ a good translation (given certain standards about what makes a translation good) or whether it ‘is’ rather an adaptation (given a certain normative cut-off point between a translation and a text that takes too many liberties) or whether a text *t* is really ‘translatable’ (even though translations of text *t* exist or abound). Descriptive analysis now asked more interesting and academic questions, such as: How does a culture conceive of translation? Which texts does this culture select for translation, and which ones does it leave aside? Are certain norms at work in the selection of ‘source texts’ (STs, that is, originals)? Are translations in this culture ‘central’ or ‘peripheral’ texts (vis-à-vis domestic production)? Do translations in this culture closely adhere to the language and cultural materials of the ST or do they adapt the ST to what the target culture is familiar with? Or do some translations adapt or adhere in some ways and other translations in other ways? Do certain norms govern these processes and regimes of translation? If so, what do these translations and norms tell us about the target culture? Are translations always determined by cultures (norms operating in a target culture) or are certain features of translations more universal (governed by what seem to be ‘laws’)? These are questions that constitute and direct a sociocultural, historical research program.

Significantly, Toury often used the word *system* instead of *culture*, for he had adopted the theoretical premises of Polysystem Theory, a systemic view of culture developed by his doctoral supervisor Even-Zohar. Incidentally, many have therefore come to regard ‘descriptive’ or ‘systemic’ TS as synonymous or largely overlapping terms for one approach, though they at least signal distinct aspects of that approach. In Even-Zohar’s theory, and in Toury’s understanding of it, the notion of ‘system’ comes with the hypothesis, reminiscent of structuralism, that to understand the meaning of a cultural product (e.g., the 1963 novel *Het Boek Alfa* by the Flemish writer Ivo Michiels, 1923–2012) one has to consider the relations between products which together constitute a system (e.g., Flemish novels by post-war writers), and between that system and broader ‘polysystems’ (e.g., postwar Dutch-language novels, Belgian novels, the French *nouveau roman*, experimental European novels, the Catholic cultural system in Flanders, and Flemish society and politics). As Even-Zohar puts it, technically, ‘a system’ refers to ‘the network of relations that can be hypothesized for a certain set of assumed observables’ in cultural analysis (1990: 27). I leave aside here the question of whether such ‘systems’ are mere heuristic tools that ‘exist only in system theory’ (Hermans 1999: 103) or if they have a more ‘ontological’ or ‘psychological’ status, that is, if at some conscious level they resonate in the minds of agents operating *in* the system.

Importantly, Polysystem Theory considers its relational analysis relevant to grasp the meaning of products in the present and to understand the evolution of meanings and products in history: ‘Not only are elements constantly viewed in relation to other elements, but they derive their value from their position in a network’ (Hermans 1999: 107). For Polysystem Theory the need for relational analysis is especially apparent in literary translation, a cultural ‘observable’ that importantly stands in a relation to many things (cf. Lambert and Van Gorp 2006 [1980]). Literary translation and translated literature occupy a key position in the evolution of literary models and norms, in ‘literary historiography’, which in 1978 had ‘not moved much beyond the stage of Russian formalism in the early twenties’ (Even-Zohar 1978: 118). ‘I cannot see’, Even-Zohar argued in his Leuven paper, ‘how any scholarly effort to describe and explain the behaviour of the literary polysystem in synchrony and diachrony can advance in an adequate way’ if it is ‘not admitted’ that ‘translated literature may possess modelling principles of its own’ (1978: 118–9). Use of the term *system* suggests perhaps more than the term *culture* that political, economic and social issues are part of scholarly investigation into cultural products. Polysystem Theory rests not only on a working hypothesis of manifold relatedness—an initial assumption to be tested empirically—, it also aspires to be a fundamentally contextual approach, beyond strictly literary discourse.

To illustrate what such a framework can offer, let us apply the theory to itself, and reflect in systemic-relational terms on the meaning of Toury’s 1980 and 1995 monographs. While Toury’s descriptivist argument and combative tone had remained virtually unaltered in those fifteen years (cf. Hermans 1999: 14 and *supra*), DTS had in the meantime moved from the periphery to the center of TS, and due to this change of status—our relational or systemic analysis might go—the 1980 argument worked very well as a groundbreaking attack on the normative tradition, whereas in 1995 the same argument began to sound like a defensive stance against newer, anti-structuralist frameworks. Toury’s descriptivist sociocultural argument *by itself* had not substantially changed in fifteen years, yet what had changed was something systemic, something *relational* about it—the very status of the argument within the field (or system) of TS. In systemic analysis, a field or system—whether literary, artistic, or academic—is subject to a ‘perpetual struggle for power between various interest groups’, which makes the model of analysis not only ‘dynamic’ (Hermans 1999: 42) but also apt to be applied to the position or relation of the model itself (DTS, Polysystem Theory) vis-à-vis other models and theories.

Toury and Even-Zohar ‘revealed’ their work ‘for the first time to a larger audience’ at the 1976 Leuven conference (Lambert 2006 [1995]: 107) and hence it was ‘largely a matter of

personal accident’ that the Low Countries group of translation researchers teamed up with the Tel Aviv scholars (Hermans 1999: 41–2). However, the accidental turned out to be strategic, because the prominence of Polysystem Theory proved ‘extremely useful’ for the development of DTS (Hermans 1999: 41). Polysystem Theory was a significant cultural-literary approach that used ‘translation as its starting point’ (Lambert 2006 [1995]: 111) and consequently granted translation research ‘a place in the scheme of things’, ‘given the long-standing distrust of translation in comparative literary studies’ (Hermans 1999: 41–2). In hindsight, the notion of ‘norms’ produced an intellectual revolution as it opened up new, sociocultural kinds of research on translation, whereas the notion of ‘system’—though compatible with that of norms—was, perhaps, less a liberation of the mind than a key that opened institutional doors.

The institutionalization of DTS developed at a fast pace. In 1985, Hermans could already speak of ‘a group’ of scholars, though ‘not a school’, who had the following elements in common:

a view of literature as a complex and dynamic system; a conviction that there should be a continual interplay between theoretical models and practical case studies; an approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-oriented, functional and systemic; and an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translation and other types of text processing, and in the place and role of translations both within a given literature and in the interaction between literatures (1985: 10–11)

Alexandra Assis Rosa nicely summarizes that DTS, ‘also known as the Polysystem Approach, the Manipulation School, the Tel-Aviv Leuven Axis, the Descriptive, Empirical or Systemic School, or the Low Countries Group’ ‘was first developed in the early 1970s, gained momentum in 1980s, boomed in the 1990s, and still inspires several researchers seeking to “delve into translation as cultural and historical phenomena”’ (2010: 94, quoting Hermans 1999: 5). In any case, whatever name is chosen, and wherever that name puts the emphasis, we are dealing with an approach that studies translation as a cultural and historical phenomenon.

Section 2 of this chapter will address a peculiar issue in this regard: DTS is history-minded yet history-minded scholars are not necessarily DTS-minded—on the contrary. An important group of cultural and historical researchers of translation (e.g., Venuti 1995; Pym 1998; Hermans 1999; Rundle 2011, 2012) keep distance or shift away from DTS despite the wide consensus that DTS is the paradigm that radically and programmatically historicized the

concept of translation (cf. Lambert 2006 [1988]: 52–6; Newmark 1991: 152; Lambert 2006 [1991]: 82; Delabastita 1991; Toury 1995: 61; Hermans 1999: 49, 152; Pym 1998: 14; Delabastita 2012). The issue is sharply illustrated by two different ‘false oppositions’—one described in 1991, the other in 2012. In 1991 the young and then clearly descriptivist scholar Dirk Delabastita argued against a ‘false opposition’ ‘between so-called theoretical and so-called historical-descriptive approaches to translation’ (1991: 140). In his opinion DTS was both historical and theoretical (143) due to its

constant two-way interaction involving both describing and theorizing, in which the *theory* functions as a set of related working hypotheses, which help to direct and optimize the descriptive work, and which are, in turn, permanently open to revision and modification on the basis of feedback information resulting from the confrontation with *historical* reality. (141; my emphasis).

This early-nineties view confidently expressed an epistemology that deemed theory-informed description of historical phenomena possible and desirable. The argument was approvingly cited by Toury (1995: 24). In 2012, by contrast, the former descriptivist Theo Hermans ‘agrees’ with Christopher Rundle (2012) when the latter is ‘sceptical’ of the historical insight likely to be gained from Toury’s 1995 research ‘programme’ (243). Hermans does discern another false opposition when Rundle pitches an interesting kind of translation history (‘aimed at contributing to historical knowledge’ about the world) against a DTS-like kind of translation history (‘intent on contributing to the history of translation’ yet uninteresting for historians) (244). Yet this new false opposition discerned by Hermans is meant to be even more damaging for DTS. Whereas Delabastita’s false opposition was a way to (1991) express confidence in DTS as a historical approach, Hermans’s opposition (2012) suggests two decades later that Rundle is unfair not because he attacks DTS but because he *only* knocks down a straw man (i.e., DTS) while pretending to knock down a much stronger opponent (translation history properly understood).

2. Descriptive Translation Studies and history

It was against the background of (...) prescriptive and ahistorical approaches (...) that Gideon Toury’s proposals acquired their revolutionary hue.

(Hermans 1999: 49; my emphasis)

Hermans was a foundational member of the Manipulation School and remained a CETRA staff member for about one decade, from 1989 until the turn of the century. In the course of that period he became disenchanted with DTS, especially in the version of *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond*. Whereas Toury presented his book as a timely one in 1995, with Translation Studies ‘still in the making’ ‘as the empirical science it deserves to become’ (1), Hermans found on the contrary that the new book (as well as Even-Zohar 1990) ‘contained disappointingly little that was new in theoretical or methodological terms, and scarcely any engagement with competing views and ideas’ (1999: 14). In Hermans’s view both books embodied what Diana Crane considered the final stage of a paradigm, in which ‘the rate of innovation declines and the exploration of key ideas loses impetus’ (14). For Hermans and quite a few others, Toury’s 1995 book confirmed a growing sense of incompatibility between DTS and history-oriented translation research. Below I present eight oft-made claims about translation and history that articulate a series of tensions between descriptivists and non-descriptivists. The discussion will suggest that some important descriptivist ideas (presented in section 1) stood the test of time better than others.

2.1. Eight claims that concern DTS and history

Before we can begin to discuss these claims, we should be explicit about what the term *history* can mean with regard to DTS and TS. First, history inevitably evokes the entire realm of all things past, even though *things* is only a noun and hence too reifying a sign to denote the flux of the world. This is the realm of what was and what changed, the realm of situations and transformations that were in principle representable, whether they were actually represented in words, or remembered in thoughts, or forgotten and lost forever. Second, history refers more strictly to those situations and changes of the world that have actually been *represented* as historical situations and changes, which involves an attempt at conservation and reconstruction, one that is always selective, based on traces of the past. This is the work of historiography. Third, such historiographical representation is meant to *explain* historical states and changes, and, fourth, historiographical explanation preferably happens in narrative form, given this genre’s capacity to present a world with less than perfect chronology and causality, including characters, contingency, and blind spots (history_{OBJECT4}). As D’hulst writes, ‘une longue tradition historiographique favorise un mode narratif de présentation’ [there is a long historiographical tradition favoring a narrative mode of presentation] (2014: 21). Christopher Rundle aptly paraphrases Hayden White in this context: whereas ‘a chronicle’ is no more than ‘a bare set or sequence of events,’ (or actually a rather bare *representation* of a sequence of events), ‘a history’

or historiographical account is a not so bare ‘*narration* of that chronicle, that same set of events; it is the organizing of those events around a plot—a process which endows them with meaning for us’ (2012: 235; Rundle’s emphasis). Fifth, and as a check on the biasing capacity of historical narrative, it is worth repeating that lucid historiographical accounts avoid turning ‘the past’ into ‘cannon fodder for debates in our present’ and instead attempt to reach out and understand ‘historical detail’ on its own terms (Pym 1998: 113; cf. also Foucault 1977 [1971]). Though it would be cumbersome to keep these meanings of *history* constantly apart in the following discussion, this short terminological discussion will help to understand the claims presented below. These are eight claims about the complex research object ‘translation and history’ (Which relations between translation and history merit investigation?) and on the frameworks considered appropriate to tackle this multiple relational object (How to study these relations?). The discussion will signal to what extent these claims were made by DTS only or mainly, or by DTS and others, or against DTS.

Claim One: Historiography should learn from Translation Studies

Claim One is that historiography ought to listen to translation research in order to improve the quality of historical understanding, on at least two grounds. First, historiography will remain a naïve field as long as it works on the assumption that translations of original documents are ideologically neutral vis-à-vis the original historical documentation. Mieke Delahaye (2015) shows, for example, that different historical analyses of Columbus’s famous letter written in 1493, *Carta a Santángel*, use or even produce different translations of it, in which specific translational choices cater for specific historical arguments. Second, translation research has shown that translations are important factors of history in their own right. Beyond their framing power for historiography, translations have the power to co-shape history on the ground, affect the way things happen or do not happen (e.g., Lambert 2006 [1995]: 123; Rundle 2011; 2012; and see Claim Two for details). Yet Rundle (2011; 2012) notes that historiography has taken very little interest in history-oriented translation research. To be sure, a power asymmetry may exist between the long-established grand discipline of history and the recent field of TS that is still seeking external recognition. However, Rundle suggests another hypothesis that would explain the asymmetry: DTS has turned TS into a field not likely to spike the interest of historians (see Claim Seven).

Claim Two: History co-shapes translation

Claim Two says that historical factors play a role in the variable shape of translations: history (i.e., the spatiotemporal, sociocultural context) co-shapes translations. For instance, when discussing the features of ‘Hebrew literature of the last 200 years’, Toury (1995) argues that aspects of history—the moving geographical center of Hebrew culture, the rise of Nazism—co-shaped important aspects of Hebrew translations (which in turn co-shaped aspects of Hebrew literature). Thus, he first notes that ‘the Hebrew Enlightenment movement’ ‘made its debut’ in Germany so that ‘German literature’ in Hebrew translation (and German translations of other foreign literatures) were ‘the main supplier of both texts and models’ for the Hebrew Enlightenment movement (135). Next, as ‘the centre of Hebrew culture’ moved ‘steadily eastward’, to Vienna and to ‘the Slavic cultural domain’, Hebrew literature was ‘russified’ through translation ‘as of the 1820s’ (140–1); and with the rise of Nazism the German translational input came to ‘a virtual standstill’, until the 1960s (144). We have already said that this claim was programmatically championed by DTS, against normative theories that proposed idealizing, essentialist, and ahistorical notions of translation. Thus, to say that history co-shapes translation is to imply that ahistorical, assumedly universal definitions of translation are of limited interest. With reference to a variety of historical periods and cultural domains, DTS has shown that the influence of historical circumstances on notions of translation is an academically productive insight (see, e.g., D’hulst 2014: 21; 40 and ff). This viewpoint is arguably an important contribution of DTS to translation research at large.

Although Claim Two is a central idea of descriptivism, one may of course defend it without being a descriptivist. Claim Two is merely the general idea that history co-shapes translation, it does not specify what this further entails for a translation theory. Pym (1998) agrees for instance with DTS on the importance of explaining historically variable patterns of translation, but he criticizes DTS when he invites descriptivist scholars ‘to see their object in terms of more primal change processes’ such as ‘power relationships’, ‘conflictual social groups’, debate, ideology, and agency: ‘Who establishes and retains norms?’; ‘Who breaks them?’ How is change and non-change framed by various agents on the ground? For instance, is non-change framed as correctness by some and as ‘false consciousness’ by others? (111–112). Of course the processes and factors of history are many and often extremely complex. To understand how and why the Iron Curtain came down in 1989, for instance, historian Timothy Garton Ash argues that research should consider all of the following ‘lines of causation’:

the influence of individual states on their own societies, societies on their own states, states on other states, societies on other societies, states on other societies (for example,

Gorbachev's direct impact on East-Central Europeans), and societies on other states (for example, the knock-on effect on the Soviet Union of popular protest in East-Central Europe). These portmanteau notions of state and society have themselves to be disaggregated into groups, factions, and individuals, including unique actors such as Pope John Paul II. (2009)

This suggests that any specific theory about historical change—whether focused on norms of translation or on ‘primal’ processes—will always reduce historical complexity. Frameworks may agree that history co-shapes translation but differ in how they conceptualize and reduce history as it happened.

Claim Three: Translation co-shapes history

Claim Three is a mirror image of Claim Two. If Claim Two is that historical factors co-shape translations, Claim Three says that translations co-shape cultural history, which opens a field of inquiry that historians usually ignore (Claim One). Taken together, Claims Two and Three state a complex relation of reciprocal causation between historical change and translation: translation is changed by social and historical factors, and translation is itself also a social and historical factor in cultural dynamics.

As said, Claim Two was a central part of the descriptivist attack on normativism (Toury 1995: 61). Though Claim Three was perhaps less instrumental in the descriptivist paradigm shift, it is definitely commensurable with DTS, as we notice when Toury discusses the role of indirect translation in Hebrew literary history (1995: 130). Indirect translations instigated ‘German’ and ‘Russified’ periods in Hebrew literature (140–1), until in the 1930s and 1940s ‘a struggle for domination’ ensued ‘between the Russified model (...) and newly introduced Anglo-American norms’, which was ‘finally settled in favour of the latter’ (144). Like Claim Two (‘history co-shapes translations’), Claim Three (‘translations co-shape cultural history’) is endorsed by history-oriented TS scholars beyond the DTS paradigm. Pym argues, for instance, that ‘translation history can fulfill a service function with respect to the humanistic disciplines concerned with describing individual cultures’ and that translation history can do this ‘at every point where a culture has changed through contact with another culture’ (1998: 16). And while Rundle is not interested in ‘writing the history of translation’ generally, at a remove from specific contexts of interest, he does state an interest in ‘the role of translation’ in specific historical circumstances such as ‘in post Civil War Spain’ or in Fascist Italy (2011: 34, 35). His

interest is in the features of Francoist or Fascist translations as a result (Claim Two) and an enabling factor (Claim Three) of the Francoist and Fascist contexts (*ibid.*).

Claim Four: Norms co-shape translation ('Early Toury')

Claim Four moves from the general Claim Two—*history* co-shapes translations—to the particular stance that historically varying *norms* co-shape translations. Not only is it mostly descriptivist research that has referred to norms so as to understand the historical nature of translations, it is actually a core claim of descriptivism that variable norms are a causal mechanism in the variable shape of translations. Different sets of norms govern different translations in different periods and places. Claim Four is the descriptivist specification of Claim Two in the interest of making a sociohistorical context tangible. Though norms are not directly observable and can only be 'reconstructed' (Toury 1995: 53), they can be hypothesized as underlying principles that show a (often complex) non-randomness of translational choices in texts of a certain period (amidst alternative translational options); and since texts are always around, norm extraction makes historical tendencies (*i.e.*, translational politics) palpable and traceable. Following this line of thought, 'translation histories' can be written—histories that show how the concept of translation normatively varies along spatiotemporal lines (D'hulst 2014: 9).

Claim Four thus captures the historical factors that influence translation (Claim Two) through the concept of norms. It is a descriptivist move that creates a degree of sociohistorical complexity vis-à-vis normative, essentialist, or idealist views on translation; yet it also remains a reductive move since norms are at best mere indices or expressions of contextual complexity. This is suggested by Pym's (1998) invitation to identify more 'primal' processes and factors of change: power relationships, conflictual social groups, agents on the ground. In his 1999 book, Hermans still found research on norms a useful, albeit reductive, approach to the sociocultural make-up of translations (73); but Hermans (2012) no longer defends the specific Claim Four ('norms co-shape translations') and instead seems to revert to the general Claim Two ('historical context co-shapes translations'), also with the addition that context crucially includes agents and context-specific structures of power. 'The once-influential norms concept', we now read, 'has led only deeper into the cultural embedding and hence into the temporalized and localized particularity of translators' choices, making generalizations ever harder' (2012: 243). Many early-days descriptivists—Bassnett, Lefevere, Hermans himself—embraced the idea of norm-based variation early in their careers but later moved on to a broader humanistic perspective on the place and role of translation in cultural dynamics. When Hermans writes that

‘the descriptive line in the study of translation (...) is much wider’ than Toury (1995), he refers to the fact that descriptivism and norm-based thinking soon instigated a broader Cultural Turn in TS, with openings toward cultural power analysis at large (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990, Lefevere 1992, Tymoczko 1999) (2012: 243).

Claim Five: Translation co-shapes systemic evolution

Even-Zohar has argued that historical evolution is to no small extent a law-governed dynamics of systems, and that translation plays a major role in this systemic dynamics. Claim Five—the claim that translation co-shapes systemic evolution—is Even-Zohar’s contribution to DTS and has served as a complement to Claim Four, as a move by DTS to further ‘bring (...) context into view’, because context can provide an ‘explanation’ for the translational norms that have been detected and ‘described’ (Hermans 1999: 102). While Toury disliked top-down theory (1998: 11), he was no positivist: he acknowledged that description is never merely a bottom-up procedure, that description is always theory-laden, that the explanatory power of description even depends on being theory-laden (see also Hermans 1985: 10; Pym 1998: 14–5). Polysystem Theory thus anchors norms-oriented descriptions of translations in a broad explanatory framework of cultural dynamics. Within the framework of Polysystem Theory, descriptions of norms become inchoate explanations of cultural-systemic stagnation or change. The relatively stable or shifting norms of translation are shown to produce, reproduce and modulate cultural systems that compete for power, or sectors of a cultural system that fight for dominance, or ‘weak’ and ‘deficient’ cultural systems that desire or need to import products from other systems, or ‘strong’ cultural systems that export their products to weaker systems (Even-Zohar 1978: 120–6; 1990; Toury 1995: 104, 111, 115, 123, 133, 140, 167, 210; Robyns 1994).

If Claim Four (‘norms shape translation’) was a particular version of Claim Two (‘context co-shapes translation’), then Claim Five (‘translation shapes systemic dynamics’) is a particular version of Claim Three (‘translation shapes history’). The general Claim Three says that it pays to view history as co-shaped by translation, while Claim Five specifies that it pays to view cultural-historical dynamics as a network of ‘(poly)systems’ co-shaped by translations. Translations are important to our understanding of cultural dynamics because the competition between systems and sectors of systems often happens and materializes in the normative make-up of translations. As stated earlier, this argument—Claim Five—was an early cornerstone of Polysystem Theory, it gave TS a more critical role in cultural and literary studies, and it was another paradigmatic move toward a Cultural Turn in TS.

Though ‘norms’ and ‘(poly)systems’ were both adopted as crucial descriptivist concepts to study the role of translation in cultural dynamics, the former concept has proven more enduring than the latter. Norms have long been defended—in 1999 Hermans still called them ‘durable’ and ‘useful’ (73)—whereas the polysystemic concepts and ‘laws’ of cultural contact and evolution quickly began to ‘look long in the tooth’ even in descriptivist circles (106). ‘In retrospect,’ Pym wrote in 1998, ‘the change was not really the system model (...), which belatedly extended the scientific pretensions elsewhere known as structuralism’ (14). In 1995, Lambert pointed out that his analytic approach was broadly ‘relational’ rather than focused on the notion of ‘system’ (Lambert 2006 [1995]: 113). Four years later, Hermans warned, with reference to Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 72ff), that systemic approaches to historical phenomena are blind to their ‘benefit of hindsight’ and therefore tend to slide into a ‘naïve teleological or “finalist” thinking, which sees the end of a known process as illuminating the path towards that goal’ (1999: 119, 132). D’hulst, a foremost expert in translation history who started as Lambert’s doctoral student in the late 1970s, argued early in his career that (poly)systemic insights had allowed him to elucidate the evolution of French poetry between 1780 and 1830 (D’hulst 1987). In his later writings on translation and history (e.g., 2014, 2015) this strong emphasis on systemic thinking seems largely absent.

Hermans (1999: 110–1) severely criticizes Even-Zohar, who ‘like Toury’ is always ‘in search of universal laws and principles’. About Even-Zohar’s ten ‘laws of literary interference’, Hermans says that they are either ‘trivial’ (e.g., the law that ‘literatures are never in non-interference’ simply means that no literature is completely isolated); or ‘problematic’ (e.g., the law that ‘a source literature is selected by dominance’ suggests that the colonized can ‘select’ the literature of the colonizer); or mutually incompatible (e.g., the law that ‘interference occurs when a system is in need of items unavailable within itself’ seems incompatible with the law that dominance is the principle of selection). One partial way out for systemic thinkers has been to distinguish between more types of systems. They may hypothesize various types of systems (such as ‘defensive’ or ‘imperialist’) that entertain various kinds of discursive relations vis-à-vis other systems (Robyns 1994). Or they may hypothesize that ‘closed’ cultural systems undergo slow changes through innovative translations that these closed systems merely ‘tolerated’ (De Geest 1992). During the Francoist regime (1939–75), for instance, important sectors of the Spanish population turned away from domestic film production and craved for—or, as Even-Zohar puts it, ‘were in need of’—foreign films that were disliked by the regime yet to some extent tolerated in the form of censored dubbings (Vandaele 2010; 2015).

Another good illustration of this phenomenon is the market for translated popular or pulp fiction that boomed in Italy and Germany in the 1930s (see Rundle 2018; Sturge 2004).

Claim Six: TS ought to move from norms to laws (Toury 1995)

Claim Six is elaborated in the last chapter of Toury (1995). If Claim Four said that norms explain a degree of variability in translation (early Toury), Claim Six says that laws explain a degree of invariability. According to Hermans (1999), ‘no one else in the descriptive camp has followed Toury in this quest [for laws]’. For other descriptivists ‘the aim remains that of gaining insight into the theoretical intricacies and the historical relevance and impact of translation’ (36). Hermans thus suggests that they either stayed with the specific Claims Four and/or Five (‘norms shape translation’, ‘translations change systemic dynamics’) or reverted to the general Claims Two and Three (‘history shapes translation’ and ‘translation shapes history’), with emphases on other concepts such as agency, contingency, and power structures.

Before I explain that Claim Six is, according to one logic, clearly a revocation of Claim Four (as Hermans 1999 suggests), I will first show that Claim Six is also, according to another logic, interpretable as a radical version of Claim Four. Like Claim Four, Claim Six invites translation scholars to empirically and scientifically investigate corpora of translation in order to detect, describe, explain, and predict regularities of translation. Toury (1995) continues to build on Carl Hempel’s view that the objectives of ‘empirical science’ are ‘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’ (Hempel 1952: 1, quoted in Toury 1995: 9). The logic of scientific radicalization then goes as follows: when studying *one* translation, TS research may extract hypothetical norms that hypothetically explain and predict translational behavior; when studying a whole historical *corpus* of translations, TS can begin to test and possibly falsify the predictive power of its inferred hypotheses (extracted norms); yet when studying vast quantities of *corpora* across time and space, TS may eventually find regularities that are not merely sociocultural norms but regularities that, if never falsified, become downright universals or laws of translation with a high predictive power.

Turning Translation Studies into a science has always been Toury’s ultimate goal, and ‘sciences qua sciences are characterized by an incessant quest for laws’ (1995: 259). DTS is in this sense the ‘systematic branch’ of TS, ‘proceeding from clear assumptions and armed with a methodology and research technique made as explicit as possible’ (3). Moreover, Toury’s adversity to ‘mere theory’ befits his scientific orientation. As Owen Flanagan observes, with reference to other disciplines, the sciences want to ‘start with the facts’, look for ‘observables’,

‘stop there if possible’ or ‘infer cautiously the unobserved’ (1989: 180). This cautious procedure, Flanagan reminds us, is known since Kant as transcendental deduction. From this perspective, we may even say that Toury (1995) cautiously hypothesizes ‘laws’, whereas Toury (1976) brazenly posited the notion of ‘norms’.

Of course, according to a different logic Claim Six drastically revokes Claim Four. An important term closely linked to Claim Four (‘norms co-shape translation’) was the word *empirical*, which during descriptivist paradigm formation usefully denoted both the method of study (i.e., scientific-empirical corpus study) and the object of study (i.e., historical-empirical translations, norms across time). In its ambiguity the word *empirical* served as a bridge between more historical and more scientific descriptivists—and *norms* sounded conveniently empirical in both a scientific and historical sense. In 1995, however, Claim Six disambiguated the key word by stressing the scientific-empirical approach rather than the historical-empirical object. Empirical TS became primarily the scientific search for universal laws, not the search for historical variety in normative behavior. Hermans therefore wrote that ‘after norms the road branches. One path leads toward possible universal laws of translation. Another path takes us into history’ (1999: 91).

As we noted earlier, Hermans stated in 1999 that no one in the descriptive camp followed Toury in his quest for laws (37). However, a number of important translation theorists outside DTS, usually linguists in origin, have positively engaged with Toury’s orientation toward science and universalism. In the mid-nineties Mona Baker had already published a number of seminal papers (1993, 1995) on corpus linguistics and universals in translation. Furthermore, linguists of a later generation, such as Sandra Halverson (e.g., 2003) or Sara Laviosa (e.g., 2008) have also continued to engage with translation universals. Andrew Chesterman (2013) generally argues, with reference to Karl Popper, that ‘all scientific endeavor is intrinsically universalist’ so that ‘a putative Finnish theory’ of translation ‘would only have wider value insofar as it could also shed useful light on translation practices elsewhere’ (84) (see also Mauranen and Kujamäki 2004; Malmkjær 2018). It is history- and culture-minded TS that has not followed Toury.

Claim Seven: History-oriented TS should not be science but historiography

Claim Seven radically opposes Claim Six (‘laws!’) and any reading of Claim Four (‘norms!’) in the spirit of Claim Six. Claim Seven says that history-oriented research on translation does not belong to the overly universalizing discipline Translation Studies but to situation-specific historiography. I will call this stance TRAHl, for ‘translation research as historiography’.

TRAHI is focused on the particulars of history, and on specific methods to study and ways to communicate such particulars—e.g., archival research, historiographical concepts, and narrative explanation. From the viewpoint of TRAHl, translation scholars and especially descriptivists are overly focused on understanding translation for the sake of translation (and its regularities and laws). D’hulst (2014), an early member of the descriptivist paradigm, points out that historians have indeed protested against what they consider ‘une forme de réductionnisme et de simplification’—the quest for ‘des «universaux», des «lois» ou des «tendances» de la traduction’ [a sort of reductionism and simplification—the search for universals, laws, or tendencies of translation] (2014: 39).

Interestingly, when Rundle defends Claim Seven, he refers like universalist Chesterman to Karl Popper. ‘I wish’, he quotes Popper, ‘to defend the view, so often attacked as old-fashioned by historicists, that history is characterized by its interest in actual, singular, or specific events, rather than in laws or generalizations.’ (Popper 2002 [1957]: 132, in Rundle 2011: 37). For Chesterman, these kinds of oppositions between ‘humanistic understanding’ and ‘scientific explanation’ are alive but inaccurate (2017 [2008]: 148–9). For Rundle, by contrast, they are plain to see: the particular knowledge construction of historical situations and events is quite unlike the generalizing search for scientific truths. ‘The same documentary material’ on translation and Fascism, he writes, ‘can be narrated from two viewpoints’, either generalizing or particularizing, either working toward the general ‘history of translation’ or toward the particular ‘history of fascism’—and ‘it is the latter viewpoint that produces the more meaningful history’ (2012: 237). Rundle signals what we might call two cultures of history-oriented TS—historiographical translation research (TRAHI) versus the science of translation (DTS). With Paul Bandia, Rundle counsels that ‘we’, history-oriented translation scholars, ‘start viewing ourselves as historians’ (2011: 34), and historical translation research as historiography.

The research project TRACE, an acronym for Francoist translation and censorship (*TRAducción y CEnsura*), serves in Rundle’s argument as an example of a DTS-inspired approach to translation history, one that produces a different kind of insight to history-oriented translation research. In the TRACE project, say Raquel Merino and Rosa Rabadán, we ‘set out to study the role of translation in post Civil War Spain’, where censorship is ‘of utmost importance for writing the history of translation’ (2002: 128, quoted in Rundle 2011: 32; see also 2012: 233). Rundle argues that TRACE surely studies ‘the history of translation’, though not in order to understand ‘the role of translation in post Civil War Spain’. Rather, it uses the methodology of ‘corpus linguistics’ to contribute to ‘the universal history of translation’, and it

works with ‘abstracted empirical data’ to arrive at ‘patterns of behaviour that are scientifically and quantitatively constructed as norms [of translation]’ for that period (2011: 35). Rundle’s historiographical position (TRAHI) starts from an intrinsic interest in a particular historical period (e.g., Fascism, Francoism, Renaissance, the Classical Age, the Enlightenment, etc.) and in the role of translations in that period; it is less interested in what these translations share with other translations in other periods, which is a major interest of DTS.

As Rundle puts it, ‘in terms of historical TS [...], if you are motivated by an interest in your historical subject, rather than a more abstract interest in translation, it is my belief that you will find yourself inevitably drawn to other scholars who share your main interest – that is, other historians of your chosen subject. [Y]ou choose to contribute either to a *history of translation* or to *translation in history*’ (2011: 35; original emphasis). He counsels to ‘ask not what history can tell us about translation but what translation can tell us about history’ (2012: 239). Furthermore, different interests and aims go hand in hand with different kinds of expertise, different language uses, and different channels. Descriptivism and historiography have a different vocabulary and, more fundamentally, different views on the motors of history—norms and systems versus ideologies, regimes, agents, actions, coincidences, events. These conceptual differences translate into different modes of representation: TRAH is focused on narrating the events of a period and the role and nature of translations in that period, whereas descriptivist TS is focused on describing how translation looks and functions in a period, and in other periods, and universally (2012: 235).

For Rundle the low impact of TS on historiography (see Claim One) is a corollary of the descriptivist Claims Six, Four and even Five. To be sure, historians should be drawn to research on translation, yet historical research in TS does little to draw them there—given its self-centered interests, foci, questions, disciplinary logic, jargons, concepts, theoretical frameworks, and methods. A 1995 essay by Lambert mentioned the ‘objection (...) often used by historians of national literatures’, ‘albeit hardly ever in writing’, that ““descriptive” research is impossible since it would demand (total) objectivity’ (2006 [1995]: 128). Rundle seems to have articulated in writing what a number of historians had been saying to Lambert about DTS.

‘Eight’: TS has learned lessons – since and from DTS

‘Eight’ is not a single claim but a collection of arguments with significant features in common: they defend TS as an autonomous discipline that engages with translation history (against Claim Seven); they are critical of scientism (Claim Six) and historical particularism (Claim Seven);

they are compatible with Claims Two ('history shapes translation') and Three ('translations co-shape history'); and they welcome new ways to articulate the latter claims.

While Rundle embraces historiography as a countermove to the scientism of DTS, others also criticize scientism yet defend TS as a discipline in itself. A staunch defender of TS, Lawrence Venuti mostly ignores DTS yet in *The Translator's Invisibility* he does note in passing that 'research into translation can never be simply descriptive' since academic research always has 'concerns' (1995: 156). The influence of 'structuralist thinking' made DTS think otherwise, says Hermans, for it made 'the ideal of objective measurement and knowledge (...) hover in the background of much descriptive work on translation' (1999: 25). This is illustrated, for Hermans, when Delabastita and D'hulst (1993) contend, in line with Toury, that research on Shakespeare translation deserves 'a detached and purely descriptive attitude' (1993: 14–5, quoted in 1999: 36).

In fact, a lineage goes from the early works of Delabastita and D'hulst to Toury, to Even-Zohar, to the latter's mentor Benjamin Harshav, and further on to Roman Jakobson and Russian Formalism (see McHale and Segal 2015: 198 ff). This makes it easy to understand why Pym (1998) also identifies DTS as a 'belated' form of structuralism—the paradigm that marginalized the role of subjects and their subjectivities. As said, Pym's book criticizes DTS specifically because 'the theorists and describers of translational norms spectacularly sideline questions concerning power relationships or conflictual social groups' (111). Similarly, Hermans (1999) considers systemic analysis 'ferociously abstract and depersonalized' and jargon-ridden, because 'the struggle is waged by competing norms and models rather than by individuals and collectives' (Hermans 1999: 36, 118). Descriptivism and Polysystem Theory are criticized for being anti-subjectivist frameworks that underrate the historical role of flesh-and-blood agents operating with specific concerns in specific circumstances.

While these critical observations do not lead Pym, Hermans or Venuti to find a lack of compatibility between history and TS more generally—for they agree that TS has a *raison d'être*—they disagree when it comes to finding remedies for the descriptivist malaise.

First, when Pym finds descriptivist historical research unable to model social causation over historical periods (1998: 124), Hermans replies that 'Pym is asking for the holy grail' (1999: 155). It is one thing to observe the multifactorial nature of history (Garton Ash *supra*), it is quite another to 'model' these factors for entire periods. Though Hermans is certainly 'sceptical' of 'the historical insight' to be gained from Toury's search for laws (2012: 243), he suggests that Pym falls in the same totalizing trap as Toury and Even-Zohar (despite the fact that Pym [1998: 49] ironically cried out 'Heaven forbid!' when he read that D'hulst [1987: 17]

warned against empirical incompleteness). After rightly criticizing the anti-subjectivism of DTS, so Hermans suggests, Pym's alternative is itself a kind of scientism in its totalizing ambition.

Second, when Venuti says that description without 'concerns' is an illusion, and instead pleads for a militantly ethical approach (exhorting translators to stop domesticating), Hermans takes Venuti's point yet invites him to move from plain 'moral outrage' to self-questioning, reflexive 'theorizing' (1999: 156–7): the answer to structuralist anti-subjectivism is not righteous subjectivism. Instead of partisanship (Venuti) or a view from nowhere (descriptivism) Hermans counsels scholarly self-reflection on inevitable biases. This idea is important (cf. also Pym 1998: 49), and Hermans further articulates it with reference to the reflexive system theory of Niklas Luhmann (1999: 137–50). Yet the specifics of Hermans's proposal are less convincing than the general idea. Hermans actually sounds quite structuralist when he argues, from a Luhmannian social perspective, that translation has a 'binary code' as its 'ultimate point of orientation'—'valid' versus 'not valid' 'as representation' of 'anterior discourses' 'across semiotic boundaries' (142). Hermans manifestly engages in what he abhors—jargon-ridden binary thinking. More fundamentally, the idea that the notion of 'translation' socially implies a 'validity' as a 'representation' of 'anterior discourse' does make sense, yet it adds little to Toury's idea that translation is 'assumed translation', that translation is 'what counts as' translation in a certain group or community or period. Toury's idea was and is a bold, useful, non-essentialist, liberating, and field-defining move. In any event, Hermans, Venuti and Pym do not want to abandon TS but rather want TS to move on. Their reflections on the role of translation—whether outraged or self-reflexive—do not lead them to argue against TS as an autonomous discipline. Their aim is to keep TS away from undesired biases of descriptivism.

Like others, Carol O'Sullivan (2014) associates descriptivism with another infamous *ism*, positivism—data gathering devoid of rich interpretation. Rundle (2012) suggests that structuralism goes hand in hand with positivism when quantification is preferred over thick description, hermeneutic sophistication, and historical anchoring. He diagnoses that 'historical TS is (...) in danger of accumulating a vast archive of heterogeneous case studies' (236) whereas we really need 'an approach that is necessarily selective' (235) with a narrative argument and 'an interpretive perspective' (2011: 41). At its worst, 'description' turns into 'tagging' corpora (with a rigid predefined taxonomy), and counting the tags. Again, however, any anti-positivist sentiment does not automatically lead scholars to embrace historiography, as occurs in Rundle's argument. Hermans (2012) agrees with Rundle that we need 'protection against the spectre of a vast heterogeneous archive without head or tail' (245) yet he takes DTS

less to task for data gathering than for theoretical constructs—laws, systems, norms—that pretend to explain data in the manner of structuralism. Instead of historiography (TRAHI) Hermans argues for a more sophisticated version of TS.

3. Conclusion: False oppositions, real struggles

Descriptivism sees great compatibility between description and historiography, as when it claims to describe the evolution of norms. Descriptivism also sees great complementarity between the historiography of translation and historiography in general, as it claims that the evolution of translation partakes in the evolution of the sociocultural world. Other translation scholars have instead found oppositions between descriptivist science and humanistic historiography, or between translation-centered history (DTS) and translation as part of historiography (TRAHI). These criticisms have in turn been called ‘false oppositions’. All of this suggests one thing at the very least—an ongoing debate to frame the power relations between translation research and historiography.

Delabastita (2012: 247) notes on the one hand that even the translation research envisaged by Rundle (TRAHI) will inevitably owe much to DTS: reflection on norms, repertoires, institutions, trade imbalances, cultural import/export mechanisms, struggles for cultural dominance, relationships between translational import, original production and tradition, discourses about translation, etc. ‘Let us not forget’, Delabastita writes, that descriptivist scholars ‘first theorized and demonstrated the importance’ of these ideas (247). ‘Under what kind of label [this body of ideas] has chances to survive is not the main point’, Lambert already stated in 1995 (130). On the other hand, Rundle argues that TS, in its desire for autonomy and legitimation, leans too heavily on the scientific principles inherited from DTS, even though these principles are mostly irrelevant for translation and history.

The debate is therefore not—or no longer—about the unquestionably historical nature of translation, nor about the unquestionable role of translations in history, but about the status of TS as a field of inquiry vis-à-vis historiography, and about the conditions under which TS can be or become relevant for historiography. Such debates refer to a cluster of elements: expertise (historical periods or translation as a concept), research culture (focused on particulars of the past or on generalization), audience selection (plain-words narrative or conceptual jargon), methodology (narrative explanation or the falsification of hypotheses), and the kind of theoretical frameworks considered apt to provide explanations of historical phenomena. DTS took a radical step toward the historicization of translation and instigated the so-called Cultural

Turn in TS—despite its structuralist pull toward universalism. The new debates—or additional ones, in Delabastita’s argument—are about the need for thick interpretation, the role of agency and agents, an eye for the particular, the uses and pitfalls of narrative explanation, and the modes of self-reflection that allow scholars to awaken to their own biases and limitations.

4. Further reading

1. Bassnett, Susan, and André Lefevere (eds) (1990) *Translation, History, and Culture*. London & New York, Routledge.

This book illustrates the Cultural Turn taken by notable scholars linked to DTS in the 1970s and 1980s.

2. D’hulst, Lieven (2014) *Essais d’histoire de la traduction: Avatars de Janus*. Paris, Classiques Garnier.

This book, by an expert in DTS and translation history, discusses a variety of goals, questions and approaches in research on translation history.

3. Hermans, Theo (1999) *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and Systemic Approaches Explained*. Volume 7. Manchester, St Jerome (Routledge).

This book offers an insider’s account of the rise of descriptivism as well as a critique of DTS from the 1990s onward.

4. O’Sullivan, Carol (ed.) (2012) *Rethinking Methods in Translation History*, special issue of *Translation Studies* 5, No. 2: 131–38.

This edited volume gathers a variety of views and claims on the relation between translation and history.

5. Toury, Gideon (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies - and beyond*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia, John Benjamins.

Toury’s opus magnum is both a culmination of descriptivism and a controversial shift away from history.

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