

17. Context in Translation and Interpreting Studies

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17.1. Introduction

Popular perceptions of translation and interpreting assume that these forms of interlingual and intercultural mediation are based on an essential determinacy of meaning. This lay understanding of the written and oral modes of interlingual transposition that translation and interpreting entail is largely informed by a conception of original texts as “entit[ies] with a stable, definable meaning” that translated texts should aim to deliver in the target language (Mason 2006:359). This view prevailed also in early translation scholarship published between the late 1940s, when translation emerged as an academic discipline (Tymoczko 2013), and the late 1980s. During this period translation was regarded as a subfield of linguistics and theorization on translation initially revolved around a rigid understanding of textual equivalence as a form of identity rather than similarity (Tymoczko, *ibid.*). These early views were gradually superseded by other perspectives that placed less emphasis on referential or denotative equivalence, acknowledging instead the role that a range of linguistic units and ranks, text-normative constraints and textual effects played in the production of equivalent translated texts (Kenny 1998:96). The premise that translators and interpreters operate in a complex and often sensitive cross-linguistic and cross-cultural environment that calls for the exercise of professional judgement in context is now firmly entrenched in disciplinary discourses. However, the construct of context has not been the subject of systematic theorization on translation and interpreting until relatively recently.

This chapter sets out to explore how scholarly thinking on context has informed research in translation and interpreting studies since the early 1990s. It begins with a historical overview of the contribution that linguistics has made to the emergence, development and consolidation of translation and interpreting studies as a self-standing discipline. It then proceeds to critique a range of perspectives on context in translation scholarship. These range from cognitive approaches exploring how participants in each communicative encounter come to share and make use of a given set of contextual assumptions, to conceptions of context as a field of power play where identities are dynamically negotiated. This exploration is illustrated with examples from different domains of translation and interpreting research to foreground the breadth of theoretical and methodological orientations that converge within the discipline.

17.2. Linguistic Approaches to Translation

Recognition of translation and interpreting as social phenomena, and of translators and interpreters as agents who contribute to the stability or subversion of social structures, constitutes a recent development in the evolution of translation studies as a disciplinary domain. During the late 1940s, early scholars of translation chose to align themselves with linguistics —at a time when the latter was emerging as a ‘scientific’ discipline “with a highly formalized and rigorous machinery for describing languages”— in a bid to secure academic recognition (Baker 2005:287). Between the 1950s and the late 1970s, translation scholars thus set out to formalize processes of lexical and syntactic transfer across languages as a basis for the elaboration of taxonomies of translation strategies, often for pedagogical purposes, informed by transformational grammar and the concept of deep structure (Saldanha 2009).

Early conceptualizations of translation were considerably influenced by the notion of equivalence, understood as the replacement of textual material in the source language with written or spoken utterances in the target language that may or may not fully map on to the same aspect(s) of the extra-linguistic world. Initially, equivalence was understood as a semantic category. From this perspective, translating involved finding utterances or sentences in the target language that referred to the same “slice of reality” (Rabin 1958:123) as its source language counterpart, irrespective of the specific constraints at play in the communicative situation. Over the next few decades, the treatment of equivalence by translation scholars incorporated additional dimensions beyond semantics. In this revised approach, translations were regarded as equivalent if they managed to reproduce the ‘same effect’ that their respective source texts had on their readers (Nida 1964, Nida and Taber 1969), or to match the main ‘textual function’ or communicative purpose of the original text (Reiss 1971, House 1977/1981).

As the discipline developed, the emphasis placed by these early theories on formal linguistic analysis —rather than on translation as a social, professional or political phenomenon— and on the sentence as the uppermost unit of analysis came to be perceived as unnecessarily mechanistic. By the mid 1980s, a growing consensus emerged, particularly among German scholars, about the difficulty of measuring the effect of translated texts on their readers (Vermeer 1989, Nord 1991). The focus was therefore shifted to the fact that translated texts often need to serve a different function from the one that motivated the production of the original text in the first place. For proponents of functionalist perspectives, including skopos theory, ‘adequacy’ is achieved when translations successfully comply with the commissioner’s requirements (Vermeer 1989), thereby acquiring a function of their own within the target socio-cultural context (Nord 1991).

With the influence of linguistics gradually eroding, the contribution of other disciplines in the humanities to translation studies, most notably cultural studies and literary theory, gained growing recognition. This alternative orientation, often referred to as the ‘cultural turn’, represented a shift from the positivism fostered by linguistic approaches to a more relativist stance on the study of translation (Marinetti 2011), ultimately informed by the premise that the meaning of a text is unstable and culturally constructed. By highlighting the impact of socio-cultural constraints on the translational activity (Hermans 1985, 1996; Venuti 1995), the new approach challenged “long-held tenets of translation such

as the very notion of S[ource] T[ext]-T[arget] T[ext] equivalence” (Munday 2009:11) and paved the way for the politicization of translation studies.

The epistemological challenge that cultural approaches to translation studies ushered in, combined with developments in various strands of linguistic research, widened the range of theoretical frameworks available to translation scholars with an interest in textual analysis. House’s translation quality assessment model (1997), for example, elaborated on her earlier application of Hallidayan linguistics (1977/1981) to examine how translation is influenced by register, which encapsulates the connection between texts and their situational micro-contexts in each communicative encounter, and genre, namely the ritualized conventions of the culture in which texts are used to serve specific purposes. Also drawing on the Hallidayan tradition, Hatim and Mason (1990) explored how discourse and genre —conceptualized in their work as social planes that capture the ritualized linguistic expressions of socio-cultural attitudes and the culturally recognized verbal means through which speakers pursue social goals, respectively— find expression in texts.

Hatim and Mason’s (1997) understanding of translation as a form of mediation across these semiotic dimensions and their emphasis on the mutually shaping relationship between translation and the social situations where it is embedded brought into sharp relief the influence of ideology and power on translators’ and interpreters’ behaviour. The contribution of translators’ decisions to reinforcing or countering the use of language as an instrument of ideological control in original texts emerged as a distinct object of inquiry in studies informed by critical discourse analyses of texts in political, institutional and journalistic settings (Calzada Pérez 2007, Kang 2007, Schäffner 2003, 2012). Baker’s (2006a) application of socio-narrative theory in translation studies provided scholars in the field with a framework to account for translators’ and interpreters’ behaviour in terms of the alignment or clash between the narratives or views of the world that they subscribe to and the narratives that circulate in their environment, including those inscribed in the texts they translate. Baker’s original conceptualization of narratives and the revised typologies proposed by subsequent scholars (Baker 2010, Bassi 2015, Boéri 2008, Harding 2012) have revealed how the intersection between personal, public, conceptual and meta-narratives can influence translators’ and interpreters’ interventions in the target language and ‘re-narrate’ the texts they work with. For translators, re-narrating a text —for example, as a form of resistance against narratives that create the conditions for the emergence or perpetuation of moral or armed conflict— involves exercising agency and discharging their moral duty to decide whether “to reproduce existing ideologies as encoded in the narrative elaborated in the text or utterance, or to dissociate themselves from those ideologies, if necessary by refusing to translate the text or interpret in a particular context at all” (2006a:105).

As the theoretical foundations of the discipline have broadened, the range of models and methods used in translation and interpreting research are no longer limited those originally borrowed from literary criticism and contrastive linguistics. Whilst translation studies continues to rely mainly on qualitative methods of textual analysis (Chesterman 2000), there is a growing trend to make use of interviews (Diriker 2004, Marín Lacarta 2020, Sapiro 2014, Torikai 2009, Zwischenberger 2020) and ethnographic methods (Koskinen 2008, Tesseur 2014, Yu 2017). Process-oriented research, on the other hand, has drawn on and adapted methods from the field of cognitive psychology to empirically

test the processes of cognitive management that interpreters activate under stress conditions, access translators' and interpreters' thought processes through think-aloud protocols, and monitor other process-related decisions through eye-tracking (Fonseca 2015, Hvelplund 2017, Lacruz 2017) or keystroke logging devices (Lörscher 1991, Halverson 2017, Jääskeläinen 1999, Jakobsen 2006, Lörscher 1991, Rodríguez-Inés 2017).

Corpus linguistics has also made an important contribution to translation and interpreting studies since the 1990s (Laviosa 2002). Parallel corpora consist of computer-held sets of texts in the source language and their target language versions in one or more languages, whereas comparable corpora are collections of texts written in the same language that share certain features or selection criteria (e.g., period of publication, topic, genre) (Kenny 2009). The use of corpora in translation studies research is driven by the premise that translational activities are bound to leave traces in the target text (Baker 2003). Using concordancing software, corpus-based translation studies have focused on the distinctive patterns of language use observed in translated language, also referred to as 'typical features of translation' (Olohan 2004), including the tendency of translated texts to be more explicit and use more conventional grammar and lexis than texts originally written in either the source or target languages. The compilation and study of corpora continue to serve as a robust methodology in advancing applied (Ferraresi et al. 2010, Kübler and Volanschi 2012, López-Rodríguez 2016, Rodríguez-Inés 2017, Tagnin and Teixeira 2012) and theoretical research agendas, including but not limited to the study of creative language (Dirdal 2014, Saldanha 2014), multimodal texts (Bernardini et al. 2018, Soffritti 2019) or translation processes as part of mixed-methods approaches (Halverson 2017 and Szymor 2017).

As this historical overview shows, early linguistic approaches to translation focused on systemic differences between languages and developed semantic notions of equivalence to formalize internal mechanisms of textual transfer at sentence level. As the positivist epistemological orientation underpinning this body of scholarship began to lose its explanatory power, various disciplines in the humanities shifted the analytical lens onto more relativistic dimensions of translation —including the role of communicative situation, culture and power. Since the 1990s, these aspects located at the interface between language and context have become more salient also in research work undertaken by linguists capitalizing on the affordances of new qualitative and quantitative research methods.

17.3. Translation and Context

Baker's insight that the notion of context "is hardly ever subjected to scrutiny in its own right", despite "being routinely invoked in much of the literature on translation and interpreting" (2006b:322), drives her critique of three conceptualizations of context developed by scholars in the fields of pragmatics and linguistic anthropology that have the potential to facilitate new developments in translation studies. This section examines how each of these approaches to the study of context has been applied in translation research, drawing on examples from various areas within the discipline.

17.3.1. Social versus Cognitive Approaches

The first perspective is articulated around the distinction between social and cognitive approaches to context. In social approaches to context, the translation activity is examined against the sets of pre-existing situational parameters and entities that mould real-world communicative encounters. Social perspectives on context in the field of translation studies, Baker (2006b) argues, are ultimately fashioned after Hyme's (1964) SPEAKING model and its constitutive dimensions: SETTING, pertaining to specific physical circumstances and the wider culture that encounters are embedded in; PARTICIPANTS, including members acting as overhearers or bystanders; ENDS, understood as sets of outcomes and goals that may be individually or collectively pursued; ACT SEQUENCE, pertaining to the way in which a text unfolds; KEY, referring to the mood or tone of the communicative encounter; Instrumentalities, as in channels and forms of speech; NORMS or socially agreed forms of behaviour or performance expected in any given setting; and GENRE, which designates conventionalized types of communicative encounters. Context, as realized through this set of parameters, assists text producers and receivers in assigning meaning to linguistic form, particularly when "the linguistic form on its own supports a whole range of meanings", some of which can then be "eliminated or downplayed" (Baker 2006b:323).

As noted in Section 20.2, explorations of the impact of situational and cultural parameters on translational decisions have been informed primarily by applications of key Hallidayan concepts, notably register and genre, in translation studies (Bell 1991, Hatim and Mason 1990, 1997; House 1977/1981). But as sociological approaches to translation have gained recognition in recent years, a growing body of researchers have turned their attention to new aspects of the relationships between translators and other actors (Chesterman 2006). Gambier (2006), who advocates a differentiation between the sociology of translations and of their translators, makes a strong case to explore translators' life stories, professional status, career paths or working conditions under the widening remit of translation studies.

This call has been heeded, among others, by scholars working on translation in digital culture. Technological advances have enabled the creation of networked communities of participatory translation, often consisting of individuals without formal training in interlingual and intercultural mediation (Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012). With translation, whether crowdsourced or unsolicited, emerging as a form of immaterial labour that enables the flow of translated content outside traditional publishing and media industry circles, it has become ever more important to understand the motivations of these individuals (PARTICIPANTS) to become involved in the translation of digital commodities as members of wider assemblages of affective production (SETTING). Drawing on surveys as her core research method, McDonough Dolmaya (2012) investigates whether and why Wikipedia volunteer English translators donate their labour for a range of other crowdsourced translation projects. The information these individuals provide on their previous translation experience and current occupation allows McDonough Dolmaya to identify a number of 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' motivations to translate. These reveal their personal perceptions of translation (NORMS) and signal their willingness to translate for other crowdsourced translation projects (e.g., 'cause-driven'

vis-à-vis ‘product-driven’ or ‘outsourcing-driven’ initiatives) (GENRES). Other studies (McDonough Dolmaya 2011) focusing on blogs run by translation scholars and practitioners identify personal circumstances and the content of posts (KEY) as explanatory parameters of bloggers’ attitudes towards translation, as well as the technological and ethical challenges associated with certain practices —thus opening new perspectives on the sociological dimensions of translation.

But social perspectives on context also drive research on more traditional areas of enquiry in translation studies. Placing the concept of re-translation at the centre of his study, Jones (2019) harnesses the power of corpora to scrutinize two language versions of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* separated by more than one and a half centuries (Bloomfield 1829, Lattimore 1998) and unveil how the ordinary population of Thucydides’ Greece (referred to in the Greek original by a range of expressions, including but not limited to ‘the common people’) is characterized in two different periods of modern English history. Bloomfield’s version published in the first half of the nineteenth century, on the one hand, shows a preference for ‘the multitude’ —a derogatory expression signaling a certain degree of contempt for the lower social classes in early modern England. By contrast, Lattimore tends to favour phrases like ‘common people’ or ‘the majority’ with more positive connotations. While Bloomfield’s characterization of the ordinary population in Thucydides’ time foregrounds the heterogeneity and the competing desires of the group, Lattimore’s emphasizes solidarity and a sense of unity of will. Jones’ analysis explores a number of situational perspectives —including the translators’ political views at different points in history— to account for these choices:

The extent to which these choices are the result of deliberate, conscious strategies on the part of Lattimore or Bloomfield is of course extremely difficult if not impossible to assess. [...] [M]any forces are at play in the retranslation process and the differences observed must consequently be explained with reference not only to each translator’s personal politics, but also to broader trends of linguistic and ideological change within society at large. [...] Thucydides himself was a member of the Athenian aristocracy and it is now widely accepted that he was rather ambivalent in his opinion of democracy, remaining undecided in his assessment of the suitability of the ordinary Athenians to hold political power [...] [I]t is in my view likely that the patterns discussed above can be attributed at least in part to the radically diverging sets of stereotypical knowledge that have formed the schemata of interpretation for each translator’s representation of the non-elite members of the ancient Greek societies described. (Jones 2019:6-7)

The context (conceptualized as SETTING in Hymes’ model) in which the two translators worked is bound to have provided Bloomfield and Lattimore with diverging experiences and social role knowledge of the ordinary class in their respective communities, thus filtering their personal interpretations of the way in which ‘the common people’ behaved and acted in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*. In this case, studying translation from a situational perspective helps us to understand how different translators retrieved different meanings from the same linguistic expressions, based on the impact that the social structures they were embedded in had on their interpretation of Thucydides’ discourse.

Cognitive perspectives, on the other hand, regard context as a psychological construct. Under this approach, translational decisions are to be accounted in terms of the translator's assumptions about who the target readers or viewers of a translated text are. Cognitive perspectives of context —as elaborated in the field of discourse studies by Van Dijk (2001a, 2001b)— have informed the work of researchers interested in pragmatic aspects of the translation activity. Leppihalme (1997), for example, examines whether Finnish readers are able to access the implicated premises that allusive passages in the original English texts were able to evoke in their original readership. As the English and Finnish versions are bound by their own genre conventions and influenced by their respective cultural traditions and intertextual networks, readers' comprehension of implicatures in the target language may be facilitated or hampered by translators —specifically, by their assumptions about Finnish readers' capacity to bring relevant contextual information to the text.

The extent to which meaning can be inferred from the interaction between a text and its context has also been examined in the context of Bible translation. Hill (2007) draws on the relevance-theoretic premise that readers expect texts to be as easily comprehensible as possible, thus following the “path of least interpretive effort” in processing said texts (Wilson & Sperber 2004:613-614). More pointedly, Hill's study focuses on the potential mismatch between the implicatures —namely the contextual assumptions or implications (Sperber and Wilson 1995:194-195)— that the original text evoked among its readers and those that can be realistically retrieved by a contemporary target audience. Hill argues that only by striking an optional ‘effort-benefit’ balance can translators draw safe assumptions as to whether the audience of the translated text may be able to infer the intended meaning. Following Gutt (2000), Hill (2006:56-46) suggests that one way of tackling problems arising from the differences between the cognitive environments of source- and target-language readers is to ‘explicitate’ the relevant implicated premises. This ‘contextual adjustment’ or ‘contextual bridge’ can be achieved both within the text, i.e., with the insertion of an explanatory word or a lengthier linguistic expression, or outside the text, e.g., by means of a footnote (Hill 2006:45, 82-85). The relevance of specific sets of assumptions to understand how translated allusive texts are comprehended would have been unverifiable, were it not for methodological innovations that translation studies has witnessed in recent decades. The reception studies undertaken by Leppihalme and Hills drew on interviews to establish whether readers had managed to work out intended implicated premises. Experimental reception studies have also been carried out by other researchers exploring how translators and their readers negotiate the interface between their respective cognitive environments (Desilla 2012, 2014) —i.e., the set of assumptions that they share, as opposed to those that translators assume are shared (Hill 2007:14)

More recently, cognitive perspectives on context have informed scholarly research on and professional practices in audio description. In this form of intersemiotic mediation, visual aspects of an audiovisual text that play an important role in driving the plot forward are ‘described’ in spoken form for the benefit of visually impaired viewers during stretches of the film that feature no dialogue. Early scholarship on audio description therefore assumed that describers fashion their narration by drawing on their professional judgement and deciding how much and what type of information viewers need at any given point (Orero 2008). Translational decisions made by practitioners were

thus held to be motivated by their impressions as to which elements of the visual context had to be encoded in spoken form to assist viewers in their comprehension of the film.

The arbitrariness stemming from the fact that the describers' assumptions were unverifiable went unchallenged during the formative years of audio description studies. Relying on practitioners' assumptions as a product of their own cognitive processes was acceptable because "[e]ven after watching the same film different people have different recollections and interpretations, and in some cases some details are observed by some while going unnoticed by others" (Orero and Vilaró 2012:297–298). But methodological advances enabled by technological developments have sought to address the arbitrariness that lies at the heart of cognitive perspectives on context. Eye-tracking analyses have been undertaken to gain a more systematic understanding of the reasons why viewers' attention tends to be drawn to certain visual elements and the reasons why that is so. The premise underpinning this research strand is that, by establishing which visual components are more prominent for sighted viewers, researchers will be able to understand the role they play in facilitating the viewers' comprehension of multimodal texts. By transferring these evidence-based insights to audio description practice through a set of empirically derived guidelines, audio describers should be able to "re-narrativize film more effectively for blind viewers" (Kruger 2012:69). Research produced to date indicates that, based on their assumptions about the needs of sight impaired viewers, describers' narrations have tended to prioritize visually salient elements. This was the case even when visually prominent elements did not have high 'narrative saliency' — a distinction that audio description scholars have only recently become aware of, following the deployment of eye-tracking studies to complement and verify cognitively grounded assumptions (Fryer 2019).

Social and cognitive approaches to the study on context in translation studies are not mutually excluding. Indeed, in trying to elucidate the type and scope of contextual information that their readers would be able to bring to the text, Bible translators like the ones placed at the centre of Hills' study will have drawn on their cognitive insights. Their understanding and perception of the situational context in which their contemporary readership is embedded will have acted as a lens, refracting their interlingual and intercultural mediation of the actors and events narrated in the source text.

17.3.2. Static versus Dynamic Approaches

For decades, translation scholars have tended to approach contextual variables as static parameters. From this standpoint, communicative encounters and the settings in which they are embedded tend to be theorized as stable environments "which the analyst can simply document and use to generate an analysis of events and behaviour" (Baker 2006b: 325). By focusing on ritualized conventions of culture and situational aspects of register as determinants of translational behavior, linguistic approaches to translation have prioritized the analysis of translation products, to the detriment of the process that led to their production. In the case of interpreter-mediated communication, for example, it was widely assumed by scholars endorsing static approaches that the role, status or identities of the interactants could not shift in unforeseen ways during the encounters they were party to. From their perspective, interpreters could only aim to put foreign defendants 'on an equal footing' with native speakers of the language spoken by the court, in line

with professional conduct guidelines. Under these ethical codes of practice, interpreters should not attempt to explicate or elucidate elements which barristers or attorneys may have chosen to formulate in ambiguous, implicit or unclear terms (Morris 1999, Schweda-Nicholson and Martinsen 1997). Under the influence of early conceptualizations of context in the field of socio-pragmatics, this early body of research on courtroom interpreting sought to understand “how activities make up patterns of activity and how, through their interrelation, they produce and reproduce the activities they compose” (Sharrock and Anderson 1986:293). However, in doing so, they took for granted the interactants’ tacit knowledge of and orientation to contextually appropriate behaviour. Ultimately, this meant that early courtroom interpreting studies expected interpreters to show awareness of institutional conventions and be a “pane of glass, through which light passes without alteration or distortion” (Schweda-Nicholson 1994:82).

Notions like ‘frame’ and ‘footing’ (Goffman 1974, 1981) and Gumperz’ notion of ‘contextualization cues’ (1992) served to “advance and develop a more complex and dynamic analysis of the ‘context’ of interaction” (Drew and Heritage 1992:9). This dynamic perspective acknowledged the participants’ capacity to steer the unfolding of a speech encounter, based on the ongoing realignment of the speakers’ talk to ratify, contest or ignore the trajectory of the interaction. This shift from context to contextualization in socio-pragmatic scholarship drew a significant amount of scholarly attention to the study of ‘interaction-cum-interpretation’. This label encompasses “what is variously referred to in English as Community, Public Service, Liaison, Ad Hoc or Bilateral Interpreting” (Mason 1999:147) and typically takes the form of ‘triadic exchanges’ (Mason 2001) or ‘three-way interactions’. Mason and Stewart’s (2001) work on this interpreting mode is informed by applications of Goffman’s (1981) ‘participation framework’ in interpreting studies (Wadensjö 1998, Roy 2000). In their capacity as gatekeepers between institutional representatives and ordinary people, interpreters emerge “as speaking agents who are critically engaged in the process of making meaningful utterances that elicit the intended response from, or have the intended effect upon, the hearer” (Davidson 2002:1275). Central to the participatory role that interpreters claim for themselves is their

perceived ownership of the meanings attaching to an interpreter’s output. In sites of linguistic and cultural difference—but even more so in sites of linguistic, cultural or situational inequality—the ability of each participant to control/preserve his/her own identity will be affected in a number of complex and interesting ways. (Mason 2004)

Acknowledging the potential for ongoing recontextualization—often in the form of interpreter-initiated turns, to ensure that the trajectory of the interaction is not unduly influenced by the bilingual dimension of the encounter—brings into sharp relief the involvement of interpreters in the co-construction of interpersonal meaning. Indeed, interpreters’ (inadvertent) decisions have been shown to alter the interactional expectations that lawyers attempt to set by choosing a specific type of question. Pérez-González (2006) focuses on lawyers’ use of non-restrictive relative clauses as a non-coercive examination strategy to invite the defendant to elaborate freely on a previous response. As illustrated in Example 1, the non-restrictive relative clause deployed in the

lawyer's question (Turn 5) is rendered by the interpreter as a restrictive polar interrogative in the defendant's language (Turn 6):

Example 1 (Pérez-González 2006:403)

[Participants: (S1) lawyer; (S2) defendant; (I) interpreter]

- 1 (S1) La vez anterior ya le había dicho dónde estaba la llave de la puerta del> e:::h del garaje de Las Matas, ¿no?
[The previous time [she] had already told you where the key of the door of the garage in Las Matas was, right?]
- 2 (I) But she had already told you in your last visit where the key of the garage in Las Matas was, didn't she?
- 3 (S2) She had told the three of us.
[She had told us three.]
- 4 (I) Nos lo había dicho a las tres.
- 5 (S1) **La cual seguramente sería demasiado pesada para abrirla** con una mano en caso de necesidad.
[Which would probably be too heavy to open with one had if it were necessary for you to do so.]
- 6 (I) **And do you think you would manage to open it** with only one hand, if you had to?
- 7 (S2) I shouldn't think so.
[I don't think so.]
- 8 (I) No creo.
- 9 (S1) Ah> Así que ya la había abierto antes, ¿no?
[Oh> so you had opened it before, right?]

As Pérez-González's analysis shows, the interpreter's version does not represent a major interpersonal shift—in terms of coerciveness, for example. However, it “modifies the pragmatic force of the original elicitation by substantially restricting the responder's degree of freedom to design their own contribution” (2006:404). By eliciting a much more compact reply, the interpreters' rendition disrupts the trajectory that the lawyer had envisaged for the parties' negotiation of their interactional common ground; in particular, it alters the interactional frame against which the lawyer (and the jury) assess the defendant's eventual response.

Amid the ongoing shift from context to contextualization, the current groundswell of interest in non-verbal behaviour is yielding new insights into the range of multimodal practices used to co-construct interactional meaning in interpreter-mediated encounters. The analysis of doctor-patient interviews, for example, has revealed how interpreters often deploy mediation strategies involving a “co-ordinated manipulation of several semiotic resources” (Pasquandrea 2011:477), whose relevance has been attested to also in other settings, including but not limited to business meetings (Bao-Rozée 2016) and group work sessions involving deaf and hearing students (Slettebakk Berge 2018). In a similar development, the study of interactional recontextualization in immigration hearings (Mason 2012) and pedagogical settings (Davitti 2012) has revealed that all participants in triadic interaction make use of gaze shifts to manage turn-taking and signal (dis)engagement from other interactants. The combined deployment of gaze, body position, proxemics, object manipulation and other gestures (Davitti 2015) are therefore being construed as instrumental to set up new participation frameworks at different points in the conversation (Davitti and Paquandrea 2017:105).

While not engaging explicitly with context, a growing body of studies informed by the notion of paratext is heightening awareness of the extent to which translators'

interventions can bring about a recontextualization of written texts. Genette (1987, 1997) elaborated the concept of paratext outside the field of translation studies to designate any element that delivers authorial commentary on a text or influences its reception. His typology of paratextual elements ranges from material elements, including typesetting and binding, to more discursive elements, such as prefaces, reviews or interviews. When developing this typology of paratexts, Genette had in mind the reception of texts within the same community where they had been published. However, translation scholars have extended its domain of application to explore how it can inform studies on the reception of texts travelling across languages and cultures. As far as their recontextualizing role is concerned, paratexts have been shown to influence the perception and image of individual authors or entire countries by target cultures. Watts (2005) and Kung (2010), for example, have shown how western publishers produce promotional blurbs and choose covers for translated novels with a view to enhance the ‘otherness’ of the source culture or accentuate stereotypical representations of foreignness that target readers subscribe to. Although translators are not directly involved in the choice of paratextual elements at play in these examples, other studies show that translators can be directly involved in making paratextual choices. Alkroud (2018), for example, addresses the political, linguistic and cultural conflict between Arab hegemony and Berber counter-hegemony in Morocco and Algeria. Gaining independence from France allowed both countries to assert themselves as Arab nation-states, deploying a homogenization strategy to promote Arabization and eradicate ethnic and cultural diversity within their territories. Marginalized within the newly created states, the Berbers disagreed on whether and how to negotiate the relationship between their culture and their own language (Tamazight), on the one hand, and the majority Arab identity, on the other hand. The range of perspectives participating in these debates is paratextually reflected in the publication of various translations of the Holy Quran into Tamazight between 1999 and 2017. Translators chose to signal their political stance through their choice of script for the Tamazight versions of the Quran. The Arabic script was chosen by the translator seeking to present the Berber identity as constitutive of the Arab culture and to foreground the religious significance of the text. Tifinagh, the Berber script, was favoured by the translator wishing to celebrate the ancient indigenous Berber civilization and lay a claim to ethnic idiosyncrasy. By contrast, the Latin script was used by the translator aiming to anchor the new Berber identity in a context of modernity and technological innovation.

As Batchelor (2018) suggests, the notion of paratext as a recontextualizing device has attracted particular attention from literary translation scholars—in particular, those working with texts that have been subjected to censorship, inscribe contentious historical narratives or focus on gender struggles, as they often make the mediation of the translator more visible to the reader’s eye. Recent publications (Batchelor 2022, Qi 2021) are widening the scope of paratext-based research to the fields of audiovisual and news translation, including the participatory networks of text production and translation at the heart of digital media culture.

17.3.3. Neutral versus Power-sensitive Approaches

The third and final perspective contrasts neutral with power-sensitive approaches to the study of context. This final strand of the interface between translation and context is inextricably interlinked with my earlier critique of static and dynamic approaches to

context. Most traditional conceptualizations of context in translation studies —whether they treat it as a static set of constraints on how communication should unfold or contemplate the possibility that translators and interpreters may activate dynamic processes of contextualization at any given point— “often grant [it] an inert neutrality” (Lindstrom 1992:103, quoted in Baker 2006b:329). Under both approaches, “context is a neutral field for the play of speech events, or is the cumulation of cognitive schemata that are cued to foreground past understanding” (ibid.). But even when translators and interpreters deploy contextualizing strategies to address communication challenges following their professional judgement, rather than their audience’s or readership’s expectations, the participation framework that they set up may not be necessarily ratified by other actors in the spoken or written communicative encounter.

One of the most important challenges to the centrality of neutral perspectives on context is Baker’s (2006a) application of socio-narrative theories in translation studies. Narrative theory challenges entrenched assumptions in the discipline that translators are bridges enabling dialogue between cultures. In Baker’s view, this stance overlooks the extent to which translation, particularly when it is carried out in sites of conflict, is enmeshed in the negotiation of political and moral issues. The widely held view among translation scholars that translators and interpreters are neutral enablers overlooks the fact that, in their everyday work, all translators are either upholding or resisting the narratives that circulate in their environment, including those “that create the intellectual and moral environment for violent conflict” (2006a:2). Should they choose to exercise their agency by dissociating themselves from the narratives that the text subscribes to, a ‘re-narration’ of the original text will obtain. Re-narrations are often motivated by activist or ethical considerations (Baker 2019) and involve challenging powerful political or institutional actors. Translators’ decisions to intervene and reconfigure the narratives inscribed in the original text, however, may also aim to pander to commercial interests for a variety of reasons.

The latter form of re-narration can be illustrated by the canonization of ‘life writing’ works by Central American women located in the ‘periphery of world literature’ (Casanova 2004). Through their translation into English, these revolutionary writings featuring ethnic female protagonists have managed to access the curriculum in Anglo-American universities, the US literary market and, more widely, the world literature canon. De Inés Antón’s (2017) narrative analysis shows how the consecration of these revolutionary writings, translated from a ‘semi-peripheral’ language (Spanish) to a ‘hyper-central’ one (English), involves a significant reframing of the narratives underpinning the original Latin American works located at the periphery of world literature. The narratives of political radicalism and women’s agency inscribed in the source texts are re-narrated so that they can better resonate with mainstream narratives circulating in US universities and the publishing industry placed at the centre of world literature.

For example, Gioconda Belli’s memoir *El país bajo mi piel. Memorias de amor y guerra* (2001) is a love story narrated against the backdrop of an exotic and romanticized revolution —i.e., the *Sandinista* movement that Belli was involved in. Among other distinctive features, Belli places female subjectivity at the centre of her memoir, writing openly about aspects of women’s intimate lives, including menstruation, birth, eroticism and sex. De Inés Antón’s analysis shows how the translation published for the US market (*The Country under My Skin*, 2002) re-narrates Belli’s narratives of motherhood and

female subjectivity, aligning them with conventional public narratives of western feminism. Of particular note is the fact that, while political and sexual radicalism were inextricably interwoven in the original text, the English translation disentangles these narratives and presents them as two separate radicalisms. On the whole, this instance of re-narration shows how recent Central American “literary discourse has been disempowered politically, while paradoxically, being empowered as a commodity by globalising trends” (Arias 2007:25). The fact that Belli herself was involved in the production of the English translation is of particular interest here.

Within translation studies, neutral and power-sensitive perspectives on context have tended to foreground the extent to which institutional, political and corporate commissioners have curtailed translators’ exercise of their professional judgement and focused on the impact that such restrictive or homogenizing codes of professional practice have had on the textual fabric of translated works (Baker and Pérez-González 2011). However, the advent of digitization and the emergence of virtual communities of participatory translation have mounted an important challenge to the centrality of equivalence in translation studies and, more specifically, to the premise that translations should ultimately aim to convey approximate linguistic representations of the verbally encoded meanings or communicative intentions inscribed in the source text. This shift is particularly evident in subtitling, one of the most salient forms of translation in digital culture. In this site of media content production and consumption, subtitling is increasingly carried out by activist, fandom or crowdsourcing communities of like-minded individuals (Pérez-González 2014), who become involved in subtitling to advance a cause, support idols or assist in the development of commercial products. Significantly, in these networks of collaborative translation affectivity emerges as a powerful non-representational variable. Rather than aiming to deliver an equivalent (understood as ‘accurate’ or ‘faithful’) version of the source dialogue or narration, subtitles seek to intervene performatively in the reception of audiovisual content, “forging mutual recognition and social bonds between subtitlers and receivers” (Lee 2021:6). In order to attend to their audiences’ expectations, these communities of participatory translation challenge the profit-oriented logic of the market economy and the legal apparatus that props up sanctions for copyright infringement —an offence that lies at the very heart of unsolicited translation. Although the media industry has by and large opted to take legal action against these networks, communities of participatory subtitling continue to challenge the subservience of translators to the dictates of economic and political power and corporate regulation during the era of patronage-driven translation.

17.4. Conclusion

In keeping with the overarching theme of this volume, this chapter has surveyed key developments on the role that context has performed and will continue to play in driving translation studies forward, against the shift in scholarly discourses on context in the language sciences —away from static perspectives towards the socially constituted processes of negotiation captured by the notion of contextualization.

Structured around three perspectives on the study of context, each of which has been conceptualized as a cline between a pair of polarities, this chapter has shown how the

discipline of translation studies has been considerably enriched through its more intense and sustained engagement with dynamic and power-sensitive understandings of context. As the transition from the twentieth century electronic culture to the twenty-first century digital culture continues to unfold and translation studies becomes fully emancipated from linguistics, scholars in the discipline are increasingly aligning themselves with dynamic conceptualizations of context. While power asymmetries and their concomitant socio-cultural constraints on the production and reception of translated texts cannot be overlooked, translations are increasingly construed and investigated as sites of negotiation between actors furthering their own agendas and capitalizing on more democratic access to technologies of text production and distribution. Against this backdrop, the emergence of ever more complex forms of translation authorship and agency is exposing the limitations of traditional disciplinary discourses on translator agency and translation ethics. More importantly, this development is also raising new questions about how translation studies can engage with fast evolving forms of digital literacy in the predominantly multimodal textual genres that underpin processes of political deliberation and affective sociality in the information and knowledge society.

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