

Reception and Translation

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1. From the text and author to the reader

Reception is a term that, since its introduction in literary studies in the 1960s, shifted the focus from the text and the author to the reader. The bottomline is that a text has no meaning without the contribution of the reader. In the conceptualisation of reception we can distinguish two main traditions: a European and an American one. One of the most influential scholars in the first was the German Hans-Robert Jauss who worked within the framework of the 'Rezeptionsaesthetik' (aesthetic of reception) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Jauss introduced the term 'Erwartungshorizont' (horizon of expectations) to designate the set of cultural norms, assumptions and criteria that shape the way in which readers understand and judge a literary work at a given time. The process by which the reader concretises the potential of the text into a specific meaning or sense is what Jauss calls reception. Jauss' main goal was to find new ways to write literary history. He claimed that the evolution of the audience, not the historical period of the author, explains the history of a literary text. A second important scholar of this 'Konstanzer Schule' (Constance School) is Wolfgang Iser. He introduced the concept 'Leerstelle' (Textual Gaps). For Iser, texts provide only a schematic structure, leaving many things unexplained to the reader. Through the reading process, the reader fills in the gaps and realizes the meaning of the text in a subjective and imaginative way.

In the 1970s, almost simultaneous with the Konstanzer Schule, literary scholars in the US initiated Reader Response Criticism, which equally shifts the focus from the text to the reader. One of the most influential scholars here is Stanley Fish, whose theory states that a text does not have meaning outside of a set of cultural assumptions (Fish 1980). Fish claims that we interpret texts because we are part of an 'interpretive community' that imposes upon us a particular way of reading a text. This concept of 'interpretive communities' has been very influential and is widely used. It entails that our 'horizon of expectations' is not just subjective or individual, but is collective and based on history, geography, status, education, age, gender giving the concept of 'reception' a political dimension.

2. Reception in Translation Studies

This paradigm shift towards the reader can be said to have had a considerable impact in the study of translation, as it promoted the consideration of translations as a product of the target context. For the study of translation, this meant moving away from a linguistically oriented approach focused on the concept of equivalence*** and the comparison between source and target texts, towards the study of translation within the receiving culture and the role translations played in the identity formation and dynamics of the target culture (see Descriptive Translation Studies*).

The connection between Reception Studies and Translation Studies is thus historical and central to TS. However, the links between them go far beyond that. From a Translation Studies perspective, the concept of reader – necessarily extended to include the viewer in audiovisual translation*, the spectator in theatre translation as well as the translator itself as the first reader – also encompasses concepts such as implied reader, interpretive community, critics, target culture, and empirical reader. In this context, it is relevant to distinguish two levels of analysis in the study of reception within TS: one looks at the reception of translations at a social level and focuses on ‘theoretical readers’, the other looks at reception at a more individual level and focuses on ‘real readers’. This article presents a short review of the studies developed following both approaches and methodological differences between them.

2.1 Reception from a social perspective

Looking at the reception of translations from a social perspective means focusing on how translated texts are received on a supra-individual level. Such focus has been assumed by a number of approaches related to Translation Studies, namely Adaptation Studies*, Histoire Croisée, Imagology****, Cultural Transfer, Cultural Studies, Comparative Literature (see Literary Studies and Translation Studies*).

The study of reception does not always deal with translations; however, the booming of Translation Studies in the last decades has, undoubtedly, made translation a more common topic in Reception Studies. Conversely, Translation Studies does not always consider the reception of texts, but almost from the beginning of the discipline this has been a widely practiced line of approach. According to Raymond Van den Broeck (1988), the rise of Reception Studies in the 1960s caused translations to become a widely studied object because it incited scholars to study the way translations function in the receiving culture and the importance of translated literature in the development of national literatures.

It was especially Descriptive Translation Studies, with its focus on the functioning of translated texts in the target culture, that made the concept of ‘reception’ relevant to Translation Studies. The Israeli scholar Itamar Even-Zohar, in his seminal text “The Position of Translated Literature Within the Literary Polysystem” (dating from the 1970s, but revised in 1990), deals with the introduction, by means of translation, of a cultural product from a source culture into a target culture, focusing mainly on how and why these translated texts

and authors take a central or peripheral place in the target culture. The translated text can either function as an innovatory ('primary') or as a conservatory ('secondary') force. This idea is related to Jauss' 'aesthetic distance'. Even-Zohar also focuses on the nature of the target culture when he sums up characteristics of cultures that are more likely than others to receive cultural products from across their borders: (a) when a literature is young; (b) when a literature is peripheral or weak and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature. In his text 'The making of culture repertoire and the role of transfer' he introduces the concept of repertoire. (see Polysystem Theory and translation*) Andringa (2006) has refined this concept for the study of literary reception. She redefines the concept as 'mental equipment' with three components: (1) knowledge of works and oeuvres that serve as models and frames of reference; (2) internalized strategies and conventions that govern production, reception, and communication; and (3) sets of values and interests that determine selection, classification, and judgment. The components are interconnected in that all are value-laden or interest-driven.

The combination of translation and reception has appeared very useful in the study of literary** and cultural translation***. Both a qualitative and a quantitative approach are relevant. In a quantitative approach one can gather bibliographical information, count translations, map translation flows (cf Heilbron 1999), make inventories of translations in a certain era, by a certain translator, from a certain source culture etc. In a qualitative approach one can study aspects such as how an author, oeuvre, genre or source culture was received in the target culture, e.g. by looking at literary criticism, influence and intertextuality, censorship, etc. One can also use questionnaires or interviews to assess the reputation or interpretation of a work or author in a certain community. The influential concept of 'norms' (see Norms of Translation*) often plays an important role in this kind of approach to reception. Less studied is the translated text itself as a means of productive reception. Discourse analysis can show how a translation functions as an 'interpretation' of the source text. This line of approach – the reception of translated texts studied at a textual level – can complement the study of reception at a social level.

Especially the study of cultural transfer, focusing on the reception of e.g. Slovene literature in Italy, John Dos Passos in The Netherlands or Shakespeare in Turkish cinema, offers a rich variety of topics for Translation Studies scholars. It can also lead to a more abstract kind of topic like e.g. the translation and reception of Darwinism in France etc. 'Translation' is then sometimes used in a more metaphorical manner.

Outside the realm of literature and culture, this concept of 'reception' has not been used very frequently within Translation Studies. The study of the reception of e.g. technical or audiovisual translations has received very little attention. Exceptions, however, can be found in authors such as Chen (2011), who uses the concept of reception aesthetics (Jauss and Iser) to discuss the reception of news texts.

Baker (2006) does not limit her research on reception at a social level to cultural or literary texts, but also looks at e.g. political translations. She explores the terms 'frame' and 'framing', which can account for the ways in which discourses are altered when transferred, because they are injected by other, personal or collective narratives in the translation practice. She

starts from the assumption that the meaning of narratives is defined not only by their production, but also by their reception, which is clearly the crux of Reception Studies.

2.2 Readers response and assessment

Contrary to this first approach focused on how translation are received at a supra-individual level, this second perspective focuses on the 'real reader' and how specific translation strategies affect readers' response and assessment. Researchers try to answer questions related to (a) the cognitive processes invoked at the moment of reception of translated material; (b) the effect of specific contextual, sociological, technical or linguistic aspects on reception; and (c) the readers' assessment of particular translation strategies. In the context of Translation Studies, this kind of research has mainly been focused on the translator and the cognitive processes invoked when translating (see Cognitive Approaches*); however, more attention has gradually been devoted to readers, their competence, needs and expectations. Back in 1995, Kovačič was already calling for more empirical studies on reception and 'readers'. She considered that, without more empirical data on readers' response and assessment of translated texts, current translation strategies and tactics would continue lacking empirical testing; the process of audience design would continue unable to address the needs and expectations of 'real readers'; and finally, translators would continue to be left to their own devices and to work based on assumptions often grounded on individual stereotypes and prejudices.

Moving away from the concept of ideal viewer, this second approach to reception assumes a clear focus on 'real readers' and makes use of similar data collection methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, and more specific methods such as simple observation, eye-tracking and interactive tasks. Interviews and questionnaires are used both to collect information on readers' assessment and measure comprehension and processing effort. The amount of data collected is normally higher using these methods, but they also force the researcher to rely on viewers' perception. Among the more specific methods, simple observation is a relatively unobtrusive method to collect data; however, besides the risk of having the researcher's own subjective judgement influencing the results, readers' reactions will be difficult to scale and compare. Technological advancements have led to an increase in the use of eye-tracking in the study of reception of translated material. The data on gaze location offers the researcher insight into behaviour features of reception such as reading speed, attention distribution, the order in which elements of the translated product are received and how often there are fixated. Interactive tasks such as, for example, the use of a protest button can be used to illicit simultaneous responses; however, previous studies (Gottlieb 1995) have raised concerns regarding over or under-responsiveness from participants. Given the difficulty in collecting data on cognitive processes and the fact that every method has its advantages and disadvantages, the adoption of triangulated methodologies has been deemed more suited by many researchers. In this context, triangulation means the combination of different methods so that the results collected through one method are contrasted with the results collected by a second or third method.

Besides the problems regarding the collection of data, researchers also face problems regarding the myriad of variables that can impact on reception such as: translation mode;

sociological variables (age, gender, etc.); contextual variables (genre, year, etc.); paratextual variables (translation notes, glossary, etc.); interplay between modes (specially in the case of audiovisual and theatre translation); technical aspects (in/out subtitles, etc.) and linguistic parameters (lexical frequency, linguistic variation, etc.).

Although still in its infancy, this approach has already promoted a considerable body of work in the context of Translation Studies. It is, however, interesting to notice that, contrary to what was described in the previous section, most studies focused on reception at an individual level were, until now, developed in the context of audiovisual translation (AVT). It is worth mentioning the work of Puurtinen (1995) and Kruger (2013) on the reception of children's literature, or Kenesi (2010) on the reception of poetry; however, the number studies focused on the reception of literary translation seems always small when compared to the much higher number of studies focused on the reception of audiovisual translation. Such studies have considered different modes such as subtitling*, dubbing and audio-description as well as different audiences (hearing and viewing people, deaf, hard of hearing, blind). They have focused on topics such as the effectiveness of subtitling and dubbing, the translation of humour*, culture specific items, and linguistic variation. They have also tested the impact of variables such as age, gender, knowledge of source language, subtitling speed, lexical frequency, word-by-word rendition in live subtitling, the use of additional subtitles with contextual information, and the level of condensation in subtitles (see Caffrey 2009 for a good summary of some of these studies).

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