

REVIEW

Theo Hermans:
Translation and History: A Textbook

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Xiaochen Guo

Nankai University | Shanxi University
China
guoxiaochen0822@163.com

Since the turn of the century, historiography of translation has gained great momentum and contributed to the gradual consolidation of its disciplinary status (Rundle, 2022: xviii). The methodological issues of translation historiography have subsequently received much attention in the translation academia, evidenced by special issues of translation journals (e.g., see 2012 special issue of *Translation Studies*; 2014 special issue of *The Translator*; 2019 special issue of *Translation & Interpreting*), summer schools (e.g., see the website of Vienna Summer School on Translation History) and (entries in) handbooks (e.g., see *The Routledge Handbook of Translation History* 2022; *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Methodology* 2022). *Translation and History: A Textbook* sets out to discuss the relationship between historical translation studies and history studies, with a view to taking cues from history studies to feed translation historiography. As the author argues, it's worth listening to historians but the developments of history studies resonate modestly among translation historians. The book, therefore, addresses key ideas and viewpoints of history studies with a specific focus on methodological guidance as manifested in the organization of six chapters: 1 Stories and Histories, 2 Translation History, 3 Questions of Scale, 4 Concepts, 5 Memory, 6 Translation as History.

After a preface which sets the scene and lays out the main content of the book, the first chapter starts with three different stories based on the same set of documentary records—the Anglican missionary Thomas Bridge's activity in Ushuaia. One historical episode and three perspectives lead to three different historical narratives. The author then raises an important point that narrative is the most basic category of history writing and discusses Hyden White's historical narrativism. Hayden's narrative approach to historiography asserts that writing history is no more than 'fictionalizing' the historical material with the historian's invention and imagination. Historians tell stories framed by a certain narrative construct and the way they craft the narrative reflects their own interpretations of the past. The idea that narrative is the core notion of translation historiography underpins the following chapters.

Chapter 2, titled 'Translation History', primarily concerns 'dynamics of change' (38) and historical discourses about translation. Hermans discusses the key issues in translation history research including project aims, research questions, data collection and narrative structure. In terms of translation history writing, periodization and geographical reach reflect the underlying narratives that we construct. The author holds that the two dimensions are culture-specific and research relevant. Considering the dynamics of change in the history of translation, Hermans resorts to Borges' essay on the translators of *The Thousand and One Nights* and identifies the text-centered model and the agent-centered model. The former analyzes diachronically the relations between new translations and old ones. The latter concerns the individual translators' agendas and motives or external environmental factors. As the author argues, the historical perceptions of translation are mainly stored in the form of anthologies. However, lack of contextual information when reading anthologies engen-

ders a risk of superficial understanding. He advocates that historical translation discourses should be understood through contextualizing the texts as part of the larger constellations with a focus on the conditions these discourses emerge and evolve.

Chapter 3 discusses the scale of historical writings and their contacts with translation historiography. The author surveys from microhistory, transnational and global history to entangled history. Microhistory is not new to translation historians who construct their narratives almost through this line of inquiry. The microscopic methodology is readily adopted by translation historians in that it brings the translators or interpreters who are previously considered to be marginal into the center of the narrative (Rundle, 2014: 7). Despite its limitations in representativeness and generalization, microhistory allows translation historians to explore the relevance of singular translation practice or agent to the broader socio-historical context. Transnational and global history share the same desire to reach out beyond national borders and create connections in global transfers where translation permeates. Translation clearly intersects with global mobility and interactions. Therefore, a transnational framework of translation historiography is a productive endeavor (Bandia, 2014: 115). *Histoire croisée* (entangled history) takes a relational approach and particularly engages in intercrossings and enlacements among historical configurations. The relational perspective can enrich translation history by examining the interrelations and intertwinements among various agents or institutions involved in translation. The author gives special attention to the actor-network theory (ANT) and argues the methodological potential of both entangled history and ANT could inform how actors, agencies and networks interact in the making of translations in history.

Chapter 4 and chapter 5 address ‘conceptual history’ and ‘memory studies’, respectively, which have particular relevance to translation studies. In chapter 4, Hermans first introduces conceptual history and the two representative figures, Reinhart Koselleck and Quentin Skinner. The author particularly draws attention to Skinner's contextual approach which underscores how concepts are employed in public intellectual debates in a particular context. He highlights the importance of putting translation in the historical context “to understand what the translator was trying to *do* by producing *this* translation in *these* circumstances” (86; italics in original). Hermans then discusses the translation practices emerging from transnational conceptual history. He borrows the notion of ‘enacted translations’ from Moyn and Sartori to illustrate that translation conceptual history is more concerned with why the translations look the way they do and what the translators want to achieve in that historical setting. The author refers to Douglas Howland's concept ‘semantic transparency’ to remind us that we cannot simply take the meaning of a concept for granted and ignores its historical specificity and embeddedness. Concepts are closely connected to historical dynamics and research in translation conceptual history should relate to a larger picture and situate translation in wider historical trajectories.

Chapter 5 explores the common ground between memory studies and translation studies. After introducing the developments of memory studies, Hermans argues that memory studies are concerned with how we in the present remember the past and what the representation of the past tells us about the present. It is in this sense that translation echoes with memory in that translation makes what existed in the past become relevant for the present. “The concepts developed in memory studies have a direct bearing on translation” (Hermans and Rundle, 2021: 18). The flourishing transcultural memory studies foreground the role of translation in the migration, mutation and maintenance of memories that transcend linguistic boundaries (108). Hermans particularly focuses on the translation of Holocaust testimonies as Holocaust studies has an important place in memory studies. He cites Peter Davies' 2018 monograph *Witness between Languages*, which examines how translations mediate testimony reception across various cultures and claims the constructed nature of testimony authenticity. Hermans maintains that translation, as a form of textual intervention, plays an unsettling part in the transmission of Holocaust testimony (110). The author's analysis demonstrates that translation makes it possible that this traumatic memory becomes a transnational cultural memory.

The final chapter, entitled ‘Translation as History’, focuses on how translations interact with their historical contexts. Hermans first distinguishes layers of time in translation by employing Paul Ricoeur's idea of ‘semantic autonomy’ and argues that the original text, the translated one, the researcher's here and now, newer translations, indirect translations and retranslations are all manifestations of time layers in translation. Historicizing translation means looking for the traces of time layers. Hermans discusses eight textual traces identified in Armin Paul Frank's 1992 essay, which gives clues to the historicity of translations. The author further asks, what about translations, other than reflecting prevailing discourses, acting on their historical contexts? He presents the ‘translation as intervention’ model, which takes translations as active interventions in existing states of affairs. He puts forward seven steps to sketch such a model and offers three illustrations. What this model is intended to suggest is that to understand translation historically, translation historians should try to figure out what frames the translator's positioning and agenda at a particular historical moment.

The book's major contribution lies in its epistemological and methodological insights into translation historiography. The author proposes ‘translation as history’ and ‘translation as intervention’ in particular, which fundamentally concerns the epistemological issues in translation historiography. He argues consistently in the text that we can never conceive of translation as an intention-free and historicity-absent task, which reveals the need to embed translations within a broader discussion of historical context when doing translation history. More importantly, the ‘translation as intervention’ model further investigates how translation phenomenon contributes to socio-political and cultural repercussions in history. The epistemological utility of Hermans' arguments offers analytical apparatus

and sheds light on the theoretical underpinnings of research historicizing translation. Methodologically speaking, this book echoes with a succession of paradigms representing different approaches to history writing. The author provides relevant examples of translation historiography through the lens of the approach under study to illustrate that the methodological implications of these approaches can inspire the way we write translation history. For example, the micro-historical approach directs translation historians to use primary sources like archives, manuscripts and personal papers (Munday, 2014: 71) to construct narratives that zoom in a local translational practice, everyday life of a translator or even a concept. But microhistory does not mean only concentrating on the minute details of the particular object, but also taking the larger picture into account. Translation micro-historians also zoom out to examine how political, social and cultural contexts condition translations or being conditioned by translations. The application of *Histoire croisée* as a research method in translation historiography is plausible (see Wolf, 2016; Batchelor and Harding, 2017). The analytical tools of this approach provide translation historians with various perspectives to discern multidimensional intersections among a range of entities in translation. Meanwhile, the self-reflexivity of *Histoire croisée* highlights translation historians' position in building their narratives.

The author claims this book is not a research manual and it “speaks to students” (viii). There are, however, two aspects to reconsider in order to make the book more appealing to the intended audience. First, the author stops at providing a wealth of case studies of translation history research without further critically reviewing their employment of theories and methodologies of history studies. It is advisable to explicitly evaluate the utility of historical research toolkit used by translation historians, thus raising the methodological awareness of the students working on translation history. Second, besides what history studies could lend us, it may be more desirable, if possible, to recognize what translation historiography could benefit the knowledge of history so as to highlight the cross-fertilization between translation history studies and history studies. This book by no means covers the multi-faceted developments of history studies and there remains much ground to explore. But its impressive span of topics and ideas pave the way for further endeavors in the interdisciplinary engagements between translation studies and history studies.

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