The Neverending Story of the Translation Researcher

Resumo


Palavras-Chave: estudos da tradução; metodologia da pesquisa; desconstrução; construcionismo social; reconstrutivismo.

Abstract

Echoing recent concerns with the mapping of Translation Studies and its epistemological and methodological bases (Chesterman, 2000, 2002, 2003), this paper intends to discuss the academic discourse in the 'field' of Translation Studies as a polyphonic discourse seeking for hegemony. For such, it draws on Arrojo's (1998) critical account of Translation Studies' history as successive "attempts at occupying the academic terrain" by theoreticians who claim for established fields as Linguistics and Cultural Studies the right to legislate over translation theory and practice. The paper's guideline question is 'what are the theoretical and methodological implications of Arrojo's view of Translation Studies as "a discipline in (de)construction" to research on translation?' Possible answers are discussed from a social constructionist perspective, drawing mainly on Philips and Jorgensen's (2002) proposed theoretical and methodological framework for empirical social research projects, and from a reconstructivistic perspective, drawing mainly on a reading of the Portuguese translation of Michael Ende's The Neverending Story (1991).

Keywords: translation studies; research methodology; deconstruction; social constructionism; reconstructivism.
INTRODUCTION

Translation Studies (hereafter TS) as a modern academic discipline can be accounted as a new story about the remote past which reinaugurates that same past, as in the epigraph from Ende’s *The Neverending Story*. We might say it was (re-)born with the help of pioneers such as Eugene Nida (1964) and John Catford (1965) and at the moment James Holmes (1972/88) spoke in behalf of a new vital and growing community of researchers concerned with translation and translators he at the same time emitted the birth certificate altogether with a genealogical tree. And its first picture showed it as a mighty tree, with roots in thriving adjacent disciplines and branches growing towards its main goals. Later on many scholars of different nations joined in the job of demarcating and securing this territory and discussions arose as to what kind of discipline TS is or should be and as to what can be accounted as ‘progress’ in the field. This article discusses Arrojo’s (1998) view of TS as “a discipline in (de)construction”, and argues that such view does not imply a discipline doomed to fragmentation or ‘pre-scientific’ status as many would have it, but a discipline being constantly reshaped by the many contributions it receives from researchers at any level. According to social constructionists, “every discursive practice is an articulation since no practice is an exact repetition of earlier structures. Every apparent reproduction involves an element of change, however minimal” (Philips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 140). In such context, the scientific method prescribing rigor and objectivity needs to be replaced by successive attempts by researchers towards further awareness of the contingent nature of theories and of the need to accomplish ‘dialogue’ by ‘translating’ and integrating different perspectives, as the road to ‘progress’, i.e., survival.

1.1. Different views of TS and its progress

Arrojo (1998) described TS as a discipline in (de)construction. In her view, TS’s history is made up of successive “attempts at occupying the academic terrain” by theoreticians who claim for established fields as Linguistics and Cultural Studies the right to legislate over translation theory and practice. In an earlier paper, entitled “A Pesquisa em teoria da tradução ou o que pode haver de novo no front”, Arrojo (1992) states her view of ‘progress’ in the field:

 [...] o que poderá haver de novo nesse front da pesquisa e que poderá, sim, representar um passo à frente é uma conscientização maior das perspectivas a partir das quais
nossas teorias se constróem, seus limites e, principalmente, seu intercâmbio perene e inevitável com a prática (Arrojo, 1992, p. 112).

Chesterman (2000) classifies Arrojo’s stand as informed by a hermeneutic view of the discipline. He proposes the existence of three basic kinds of view of TS as an academic discipline, from which notions of progress derive. It is viewed as:

a) an applied science, whose goal is to solve practical problems – TS is for society, translators etc;

b) a hermeneutic discipline, whose goal is to solve theoretical problems – translation, or the translator, is seen as something (e.g., intercultural communication, cannibalism, manipulation, performance);

c) and as an empirical human science whose aim is to describe, explain and predict a particular kind of human behaviour – TS has to establish “the conditions under which particular kinds of translations are produced, or under which translations have particular kinds of effects” (the keyword here is if).

For the author, internal progress “might be thought of as gradual approximation towards a goal”, but then, each basic view “frames its goal in a different way, and thus has a different notion of progress”. For the first group, “progress is something better for someone or for more people”. And Chesterman affirms that there has been quite a lot of progress in the Applied Science of TS, “especially if you accept the machine translation project as being part of TS”. But he also concedes “there is still ample room both for translation quality improvement and for establishing better and more realistic methods of assessment”. For the second group, progress means “more awareness […] more understanding of historical and cultural influences; a more critical attitude to prevailing ideology; ethically better practices […] a better representation of the object of research, in macrocontext and microdetail”. For Chesterman, “we now have a much broader view of our object of study than scholars did, say, thirty years ago — including ethical aspects”. But he alerts that “the ‘we’ in these conclusions refers mainly to the scholarly community itself; less so to society at large, to clients, or even to translators”. And he also points out the lack of clarity about the “added value” and the “empirical consequences” of some new metaphors for translation. As for the third group, “progress means better hypotheses […] more valid explanations and closer predictions […] more facts, upon which hypotheses and laws can be based”. Chesterman points out the great amount of empirical case studies, tested empirical methods and of other significant facts, but he says that the group has “not yet made much progress towards building a general empirical theory of

1 […] a potential new in this research front that may signify a step forward is further awareness of the perspectives from which our theories are constructed, of their limitations and, principally, of their perennial and unavoidable interchange with practice” (our translation)
translation, in the empirical sense of “theory” as an explicit body of related axioms and laws”.

In his own notion of progress, Chesterman supposedly tries to reconcile the three basic views of TS:

Translation Studies is a multifaceted interdiscipline, drawing on different research traditions. Because of this, and because of the very nature of translation as a complex human (and machine) activity, we need broader and more differentiated concepts of explanation, causality, and hypothesis-formation and testing than those prevailing in narrower fields. This broadening may enable us to build a general empirical theory of translation that is both rich and robust, one that can make the best use of all three of our initial positions. And that will be real progress (Chesterman, 2000).

But it is suspicious that Chesterman chose a “general empirical theory” as the common ground and the indicator of progress for the whole area. His slant towards the ‘empirical human science’ view shows in the way he takes Kuhn’s theory to position TS:

In terms of the progress of TS as a scientific discipline, then, we seem to be at what Kuhn (1970) called the pre-paradigmatic stage. We have competing “schools” or “approaches”, sometimes known as “theories” and sometimes not. We have not yet arrived at a period of “normative” science, in which practitioners all share a basic methodology, a set of goals and an understanding of what constitutes an important and interesting problem (ibid). (Chesterman, 2000).

His stance is also revealed by the very way he expresses himself by making hypotheses, explanations and predictions. According to Chesterman, TS is in a “pre-paradigmatic position”, and that is so “because we have different ideas about what TS should be like as a discipline”, but, “if Kuhn is right, the next stage will be the emergence of a shared paradigm” (2000, our emphasis), which will represent progress if his (Chesterman’s) predictions come true.

What Chesterman seems to have missed in his reading of Kuhn’s theory is that, in such theory, ‘paradigms’ are seen as “incompatible modes of community life” (Chalmers, 1999, pp. 116-123) and consequently, “the question of whether a paradigm is better or not than the one it challenges does not have a definitive, neutral answer, but depends on the values of the individual, group or culture that makes the judgment” (Chalmers, 1999, p. 122).

To sum up, we have the views of TS as:

a) a discipline in (de)construction (Arrojo, 1998);

b) an applied science;

c) a hermeneutic discipline;

d) an empirical human science; and

e) a pre-paradigmatic scientific discipline (Chesterman, 2000, 2003).

And according to these views, progress in TS is dependent on an increase in awareness of the constructed nature of theories, their limits and their interchange with
practice (item a), better *fors* (b), better *as(es)* (c), better *ifs* (d), and (temporary) consensus around the “best fitted approach” (e). In the next section, we discuss Arrojo’s view of TS in the light of social constructionism.

2. THEORIES AS PARTIAL, CONTINGENT ARTICULATIONS

Taking Arrojo’s notion of progress as quoted in section 1.1, we now propose to investigate the two main directions suggested:

a) the TS researcher’s need for awareness about theories as constructed, limited and intrinsically related to practice; and

b) how such awareness can represent a step forward.

So, the issue of the constructed nature of theories will be discussed in this section, that of the intrinsic relation between theory and practice, in section 3, and that of how awareness can represent a step forward, in section 4.

First of all, what does it mean to say that “theories are constructed”? Who constructs them? How? What for? For social constructionists since Berger and Luckmann (1966), the answer for these questions is that theories, like many other social phenomena, are created and maintained by humans collectively. A recent publication, inscribed under the social constructionist perspective is Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) “Discourse analysis as theory and method”. The authors subscribe to the view that the aim of the discourse analyst is an “understanding of the social as a discursive construction whereby, in principle, all social phenomena can be analyzed using discourse analytical tools” (p. 24).

Philips and Jorgensen adopt Laclau and Mouffe’s poststructuralist view that “meaning cannot be fixed so unambiguously and definitively” (p. 25) as proposed by structuralists. The keystone of their proposed theoretical framework is Laclau and Mouffe’s idea that “the creation of meaning as a social process is about the fixation of meaning, *as if* a Saussurian structure existed” (*ibid*). A discourse is then an *articulation*, i.e., a “partial fixation of meaning around certain *nodal points*” (p. 26). The nodal points or “floating signifiers” are key-words (like ‘the people’, ‘the country’, or in our case, ‘translation’) that are invested with a different content by different discourses.

For Laclau and Mouffe, “all discourses are articulations and therefore all aspects of the social could have been different – and *can* become different” (p. 54, our emphasis). This is why Philips and Jorgensen criticize them for “overestimating the possibility of change” (*ibid*). Thus, feeling that Laclau and Mouffe “undertheorise the relationship between different discourses, and as a result undertheorise the question of permanence versus change” (p. 56), Philips and Jorgensen suggest introducing Fairclough’s concept of ‘order of discourse’ into Laclau and
Mouffe’s approach. The order of discourse being a “social space in which different discourses partly cover the same terrain (or domain) which they compete to fill with meaning each in their own particular way” (p. 56).

According to Philips and Jorgensen, the discourse analyst’s task is “to plot the course of [the] struggles to fix meanings at all levels of the social” (p. 24), and so, “discourse analysis aims at the deconstruction of the structures that we take for granted [...]” (p. 48, our emphasis). But what does ‘deconstruction’ mean in this context? Drawing on Laclau, the authors describe deconstruction and hegemony as ‘the two sides of a single operation’ – “Hegemony is the contingent articulation of elements in an undecidable terrain and deconstruction is the operation that shows that a hegemonic intervention is contingent – that the elements could have been combined differently” (Laclau, 1993 apud Philips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 48).

From a social constructionist standpoint, we might say then that translation theories are constructed as long as they constitute different articulations of signs around floating signifiers like ‘translation’, ‘translating’ and ‘translator’. They are constructed collectively by groups within TS. These groups do it by both deconstructing previous discourses and by making or trying to make hegemonic interventions in the field. And these in turn can be deconstructed, i.e., shown to be contingent. This picture seems to parallel Arrojo’s view of TS as ‘a discipline in deconstruction’. But the question now turns to ‘how can a researcher not only become but keep aware of this while doing research?’ In the next section, we try to answer this question by introducing and discussing Philips and Jorgensen’s proposed tools for discourse analysis.

3. THE PERENNIAL AND UNAVOIDABLE INTERCHANGE BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE – WHERE TO START? WHERE TO END?

Let us put aside the question of defining and situating TS as an academic discipline for a while and turn our attention to the more pressing question of “doing research” in TS, i.e., building a theoretical and methodological framework for an individual research work. Researchers in TS, especially newcomers, are apt to be “bewildered” by the vast “array of topics and methodologies” and that was what drove Williams and Chesterman (2002) to chart “The Map” – “a step-by-step introduction to doing research” (p. 1) in TS. In its 10 chapters, the book provides: a grid for locating areas and subareas of research; tips for starting research; types of theoretical model and types of methodology from which to choose; guidance about hypotheses formulation, justification and testing; types of variables to take into account; types of data and ways of processing them; and guidance
concerning the written and oral presentation of the research report. Useful as it may prove to be, this guide might suggest the idea that doing research in TS is just about choosing and applying this or that achieved model or methodology. Of course, the authors point out the fuzzy borderline between conceptual and empirical research (p. 58), and that the difference between types of hypotheses is “sometimes only a matter of how the hypothesis is formulated” (p. 77), but maybe the proposed route would be less slippery for beginning researchers if the authors added more such warnings that locating a research is first and foremost about choosing a perspective from which to enter the discussion about translation and translators. What’s more, the possibility of non-exclusive filiations of a research, which many times create the need for harmonizing different conceptual perspectives, is not acknowledged by them.

The relationship between theory and practice starts showing from the moment of deciding to do research in translation through the moment of proffering the research as a whole. As Williams and Chesterman (2002) point out, “the planning process consists of a number of phases (…) which take place more or less simultaneously” (p. 28). And, we should add, it involves not only relating models and methods to data, but it sets off an interrelationship between the researcher, the discipline and the research, in which they continuously draw from each other and redefine each other. The ideal situation would be that in which the researcher would plan his/her research in every detail and then set out to accomplish each predetermined phase of his/her methodology in the order shown in his/her schedule. But it rarely, if ever, turns out like this. The fitting together of theoretical model(s), method(s) and data by a certain researcher is far from being straightforward.

So, the start of a research in TS depends on the combination of the three elements mentioned above – the researcher and his/her interests, aims, attitudes, knowledge; the discipline as it is made available to him/her; and the research as it represents a record of the particular meeting between the researcher and the discipline. Of course, the antechamber for doing research in TS is finding “a general area, one that you are genuinely, subjectively interested in” (Williams & Chesterman, 2002, p. 28). But we could say that the real entryway is the theoretical and methodological perspective that the researcher is willing to join, while aware of other possibilities. It is there that the borderline between subjective interest and collective interest shows to be permeable.

Many authors have pointed out the coexistence of different ‘paradigms’ in TS. Chesterman (2003) counts five paradigms - linguistic, sociological, cultural, cognitive and that of machine translation; Gile (2005) points out two – the Empirical Science Paradigm
and the Liberal Arts Paradigm, which are akin to those referred to by Koskinen (2004) – Descriptive Translation Studies and critical approaches. Now, if there is no shared paradigm and consequently no general conventions either, the TS researcher will have, first of all, to ‘choose one paradigm’ or situate his/her work ‘in-between paradigms’.

Now, supposing a given ‘paradigm’ / ‘collective interest’ has been chosen, what next? At this point the same advice given by Arrojo (1986) to the apprentice translator seems to fit the translation researcher. She advises the translator to learn how to “read critically”, i.e., how to produce meanings that are “acceptable” to the reader’s community. For such, he/she needs to know the reading “conventions” of the community that produced the text. And the author adds that “writing” must also be learnt in a similar fashion (cf. Arrojo, 1986, pp. 76-77). If each community has its own reading/writing “conventions”, there are as many different sets of conventions as there are communities within TS. Then, the researcher will have to look for the reading/writing conventions within the perspective(s) chosen, which will either have been made explicitly in a guide or are implicit in the work of authors inscribed in each perspective. The solution will then be to read the works available and do similar work! Most of the research in TS seems to have been done this way, what seems to have contributed to the (apparently) insurmountable gaps between researches belonging to different ‘paradigms’, despite the frequent urges for ‘dialogue’ or consilience (Baker, 1999; Chesterman, 2000, 2003; Gile, 2005; Koskinen, 2004).

We would say that in order to find a possible way out of the ‘minefield’ and into a ‘flowerbed’ one has to take into account both the need for “awareness” of the existence of many different perspectives and their limitations, as Arrojo (1992) has suggested, and the need for “explicit hypothesis formation and testing”, as Chesterman (2000) has predicted. That seems to be the conclusion Koskinen (2004) arrives at, in her advancement of “Critical Translation Studies” 2 – “What we need is a mutually enriching dialogue between the two paradigms: we need critical (self-)reflection in Descriptive Translation Studies, and a strong empirical basis in critical approaches” (Koskinen, 2004, p. 153). Koskinen also alerts for the need for extra-care with the reading and using of concepts, especially overused ones like ‘culture’, ‘language’, and ‘translation’. According to her,

It may be better to follow Jacques Derrida’s advice (1976) and keep on using the old concepts, but put them, at least mentally, sous rature, under erasure. That is, we need a

---

2 Critical Translation Studies is a general title suggested by Koskinen to “an ongoing trend in Translation Studies”, in which approaches share a critical outlook, and an idealist attempt to change the state of affairs in the world”. These approaches are also called “committed approaches” and theories with an “activist component” (Koskinen, 2004, pp. 152-3). Woodhouse and others (2002) make a similar case for ‘activist’ or ‘reconstructive’ research within the Social Studies of Science, but not as general paradigm. Instead, they view activist-oriented research as one of three kinds of research defined by their specific audiences – scholar-oriented research addressed to scholars, policy-maker-oriented research addressed to policy-makers and activist-oriented addressed to activists and publics (cf. p. 311).
new awareness of the complexity, and more caution in working with each others’ texts. Our concepts may not be commensurable. There is an obvious need to spell out more clearly what we mean by what we say (Koskinen, 2004, p. 151).

So, TS researchers are advised to ‘be more careful’ with each other’s texts (and, we would add, with any researcher’s texts in whatever area) and not to treat concepts or their articulations as having a complete or definitive meaning (that is, his/her interpretation of it). And, at the same time, TS researchers are advised to try to be ‘more explicit’, i.e., to better formulate his/her definitions, hypotheses, methods of testing them, etc. In our view, that would amount to being a critical reader/writer as in Arrojo’s advice to the apprentice translator we mentioned above. But that is not such an easy task! Especially keeping aware that there is not a single theory in any area of knowledge that can be considered complete and definitive. Of course, it is difficult or even impossible to walk on ‘shaky ground’ all the time. And, on the other hand, it is easy to take (interpretations) of a given theory for granted in a given research work. For example, Chesterman (2000, 2003), Gile (2005) and others have used Kuhn’s concept of ‘paradigm’ as a synonym for a particular perspective coexisting with other perspectives (paradigms) in the same discipline, where perspectives can even be combined. Yet, as we have pointed out in section 1.1, for Kuhn, ‘paradigms’ are incompatible.

Anyway, if awareness of the discursive aspects of academic research is to prove fruitful for reflection on translation, TS researchers might benefit from Philips and Jørgensen’s (2002) proposed tools for discourse analysis, especially in what concerns the integration of different perspectives in the theoretical framework (multiperspectivalism) and the validation of results. Philips and Jørgensen caution that “it may often enhance the research framework to import approaches which are based on different or even apparently incompatible philosophical premises [...] ‘but’ – it is necessary to translate imported theories based on different premises into discourse analytical terms” (p. 156). That is, in the example of multiperspectival study they provide, not only different perspectives of discourse are brought together and combined, but also non-discursive theories (about politics, mediatisation, etc) are integrated in the framework. Nevertheless, the latter are ‘translated’ into discursive theories –

Beck proposes a clash between scientific and science-sceptical discourses […] Giddens suggests a subject construction whereby political action is linked to consumption […] Bauman points to a different construction of the subject where responsibility is privatised […] (Philips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 162, our emphasis).

The fact that “the theorists thus provide a partly contradictory image of the field” (ibid.) is not seen by the authors as an obstacle but as “a very useful starting point for the empirical analysis” since it can lead to questions and hypotheses. Maybe, examples like this can inspire TS researchers to abandon the general attitude of widening the gaps
acknowledged by authors like Chesterman and Gile, and further multiperspectivalism, without overlooking the need for ‘translating’ theories (about translation or not) into a unified and coherent framework.

As for the question of “where to end?”, Philips and Jorgensen concede there are no definitive answers. They discuss the closely related question of the criteria for validating results, affirming that “the discussion of criteria is part of a larger epistemological discussion of the character and status of scientific knowledge” (p. 171). So, apart from the consensual rejection of the positivistic assumption that “knowledge can reflect reality without bias”, there is no agreement in discourse analysis and social constructionism as to which criteria to adopt (cf. pp. 169-170). Potter and Wetherel’s criteria of coherence and fruitfulness are considered as viable but somewhat elusive candidates (cf., p. 172). The authors then suggest the following “rules of thumb” –

- The analysis should be solid. It is best if interpretation is based on a range of different textual features rather than just one feature;
- The analysis should be comprehensive. This does not mean that all aspects of the text have to be analysed in all the ways one could – which would be impossible in many cases – but that the questions posed to the text should be answered fully and any textual features that conflict with the analysis should be accounted for;
- The analysis should be presented in a transparent way, allowing the reader, as far as possible, to ‘test’ the claims made. This can be achieved by documenting the interpretations made and by giving the reader access to the empirical material or at least by reproducing longer extracts in the presentation of the analysis” (Philips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 173).

Considering the idea that a piece of research, as a contingent articulation, cannot be considered complete and definitive, and given the lack of general conventions within TS about where to start and when to consider a research complete, these rules seem a reasonable make-do before the work is proffered to the ‘community’ of TS.

To end this article, we offer, in the next section, a new and possible (though unusual) cartography of TS, derived from the reflections we have been making so far and from a reading of The Neverending Story by Michael Ende. By doing so, we suggest Arrojo’s view of TS as a discipline in (de)construction does not necessarily imply a discipline doomed to fragmentation or ‘pre-scientific’ status as many would have it, but a discipline being constantly reshaped by the many contributions it receives from researchers.

4. **TS AS A “CHANGING HOUSE”**

We now propose to read Ende’s The Neverending Story as a general allegory of the relationship between the researcher, TS and his/her research work. For such, we will focus on one of its stories that can be taken as a mise en abîme, i.e., a small story reflecting
the big story within which it is located – the story of the “changing house” (told in chapter 24). In this story, the main character, Bastian, arrives at a house that slowly but continuously changes its appearance, both inside and outside. Entering the house, he meets the Dame Eyola³ who receives him as the son for whom she and her predecessors had always been waiting. She feeds him different fruits that grow in her own body, and she tells him his own story so far (which he had almost completely forgotten). She tells him the house changes according to its visitors, who themselves are transformed after being there.

If we superimpose this picture upon the ‘current state of affairs’ in TS, we could say that while constructing his/her research, each researcher constructs an identity for him/herself, for the community and for the object of research. And we could say each individual experience in the house of TS becomes collective as it becomes another ‘fruit’ in the history (Dame Eyola) of TS. Every research, theorization, or reflection is a part of this history and represents a wish to be plucked and nourish other guests to the house. So are the views of TS as a discipline and of what counts as progress in the field discussed above. Although, of course, each piece of research stands a different chance of being accepted, not only due to the researcher’s critical reading/writing abilities. Furthermore, from such a reconstructive perspective, the notion of progress matches that of survival – survival as a discipline, as a particular approach and as a TS researcher.

Doing research in TS is then a matter of entering a new terrain and finding one’s own story inside it while guiding that same story as a collective and old one. But that is not all. The relationship of mutual redefinition between researcher, TS and research happens through ‘feed’back. Bastian, like other guests, eats the various fruits growing on Dame Eyola’s body. He opposes the idea of eating things that grow on other people but the Dame tells him this is so with babies who are breastfed by their mothers, and she adds that Bastian needs to ‘become small’ once more.

Another part of Ende’s book can be read as referring to this refusal of ‘mutualism’ – The Star Cloister (Chapter 21). In this story, “Three Deep Thinkers”, who have different views about their world, ask Bastian questions in order to ascertain who is right. When, finally, Bastian ‘shows them the truth’, each one sees their own image in it. They then dispute whose vision is correct and when Bastian tells them all visions are correct, i.e., all their images are part of Fantasia, which is their world, they do not accept this view and end up shattering their community. They are not able to share the ‘truth’ with each other and each one goes on to found a new separate cloister. Now, is not the

³ ‘Aioula’ in the original and in the Portuguese version. This Italian word means ‘flowerbed’. 
risk of a similar ‘fragmentation’ the concern of so many authors in TS? Chesterman, for example says “it seems that many of us are looking at the same elephant, but talking different languages” (Chesterman, 2000). Koskinen (2004) affirms that “one person cannot do everything and know everything. Research is always a cooperative undertaking: we build on previous work, and new information is subject to criticism and refinement by others. Research is dialogue” (Koskinen, 2004, p. 153). And Gile (2005) argues for complementarity between the ‘Liberal Arts Paradigm’ and the ‘Empirical Science Paradigm’. It seems, after all, that there is enough consensus within TS as to the need for ‘translation’ between frames of reference, sharing and cooperation, dialogue, complementarity, consilience etc. The question is that while theorists are concerned about this they are at the same time trying to convince others of their own views of progress, i.e., of what should or should not be done by researchers in TS. Arrojo calls for awareness of the constructed nature of theories, Chesterman argues for his predictions about a new (and scientific!) paradigm, Gile backs complementarity of paradigms, and Koskinen furthers ‘Critical Translation Studies’ as an estuary where paradigms mix. In a sense, they are not to be reproached in doing so. These are their convictions! But maybe (it is our turn to opine!) TS would finally exorcise the fragmentation ghost, if researchers adopted a less selfish attitude and started building bridges between perspectives instead of aggrandizing their own theories and dismissing others as not deserving serious attention. For, although there may indeed be incompatibilities between some approaches, we believe that in most cases the gap is nothing but a way of assuring and maintaining the prestige and power of the groups concerned (cf. Arrojo, 1998). TS is a profoundly inter-/multi-/transdisciplinary area, and certainly the roots in and affiliations with adjacent disciplines many TS scholars carry might replicate the same idiosyncrasies that exist in the specific related areas (e.g., literature and linguistics, generative and functional linguistics, intercultural-gender-postcolonial studies, discourse analysis etc.).

While those oppositions did not preclude the consolidation of research paradigms within the respective areas mostly because each research community was big enough to sustain its independent scientific value, this does not hold for TS. And this is not only due to sheer size. The very subject of TS seems to demand at least the possibility to maintain a more general view on translation phenomena as such, including such distant manifestations as literary, technical and machine translation, not to speak of interpreting or subtitling, and so forth. We believe that in many cases an approximation and integration of different perspectives may not only be possible but fruitful since it can allow the researcher to perform a less reductive analysis and/or validation of his/her data, whatever its nature – source texts, target texts, think-aloud protocols, etc. If TS is to
ever become a community with unified paradigms, this will not happen by imposition of one group’s theories and methods on all others – it is not a case of “the best fitted approach wins” (cf. Chesterman, 2000). Paradigms arise because most of the researchers in a field deliberately adopt or at least accept them as valid options for respectable research. Now, while this does not happen, it seems wise to reinforce possible cornerstones by furthering mutualism.

Awareness that theories are constructed and represent specific points of view can mean a step forward only as long as such awareness, on the one hand, contributes to a view of “change” as contingent upon the concurrence of many different factors, and on the other hand, if it contributes to a view of change as possible and inescapable, leading every researcher to assume his/her own responsibility for the practice of ‘informed’ research, i.e., critical reading/writing about translation while respecting other research in the same area that satisfies basic scientific criteria such as intersubjective validation by at least parts of the research community.

5. **(IN)CONCLUSION**

The guiding question of this paper has been ‘what are the theoretical and methodological implications of Arrojo’s view of Translation Studies as “a discipline in (de)construction” to research on translation?’ To answer it, first of all, we positioned such view (with its corresponding notion of progress as ‘further awareness of the constructed nature of theories’) among other views of TS and its progress as a discipline. Then, we drew on social constructionism – especially on Philips and Jorgensen (2002) – to discuss what it means to say that theories are constructed. We concluded that translation theories are constructed as long as they constitute different articulations of signs around floating signifiers like ‘translation’, ‘translating’ and ‘translator’ that can never be completely fixed.

Turning to the practice of research and the pressing questions of ‘where to start?’ and ‘where to end’, we identified the need for choosing from the many coexisting ‘paradigms’ so as to locate the research and the need to harmonize different perspectives (as in the case of research ‘in-between paradigms’). In this respect, Philips and Jorgensen’s multiperspectivalist approach was put forward as potentially beneficial to TS researchers. As for the question of ‘where to end’, the ‘rules of thumb’ proposed by these authors for validating results were considered helpful.
Finally, drawing on a reading of Ende’s *The Neverending Story* (in Portuguese), a representative of reconstructivist art and philosophy, the paper argues that Arrojo’s view does not imply a discipline doomed to fragmentation or ‘pre-scientific’ status as many would have it, but a discipline being constantly reshaped by the many contributions it receives from researchers. Within this picture, Arrojo’s notion of progress as ‘further awareness’ is ratified but only if such awareness, on the one hand, contributes to a view of “change” as contingent upon the concurrence of every minimal change effected by every individual work to the continual shaping of the discipline, and, on the other hand, if it contributes to a view of “change” as both possible and inescapable, taking every researcher to assume his/her own responsibility for the practice of ‘informed’ research, i.e., critical reading/writing about translation. In this context, critical reading does not boil down to ‘deconstructing’ previous theories, i.e., showing they are contingent, but it also entails (re)constructing a theoretical/methodological framework for research from previous theories, motivated by the researcher’s own (contingent) convictions and utopias.

REFERENCES


---

**Ladjane Maria Farias de Souza**

PGI-UFSC - Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina Cotutelle PhD student - University of Sydney USYD – Australia.

**Markus Johannes Weininger**

Coordenador da Área de Alemão, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina DLLE/PGET.