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The Self-Discovery of Translation Studies

D’hulst, Lieven & Gambier, Yves (eds.) (2018): *A History of Modern Translation Knowledge. Sources, concepts, effects*. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: Benjamins (Benjamins Translation Library 142). 475 p. Subject and name index. 99 €/149 \$. ISBN 9789027200990.

In 2018, renowned translation scholars Lieven D’hulst and Yves Gambier together edited and published an impressive collection of 55 essays which deserves special attention within the field of translation studies in general and the field of translation history in particular. The main title – *A History of Modern Translation Knowledge* – already indicates why this is the case: It promises a systematic and comprehensive overview not of the history of translation (or translated knowledge), as might have been expected given the boom translation history is currently witnessing, but of *translation knowledge*, i.e. the knowledge *about, on* or *of* translation. This is noteworthy because it suggests that said boom does not merely amount to the – undoubtably indispensable – discovery and accumulation of historical facts related to translation. Rather, the historical perspective seems to transcend the boundaries of a sub-discipline of translation studies and enter the realm of general disciplinary self-reflection, since producing (a specific form of) translation knowledge is what translation studies essentially does. In this sense, the volume’s title signifies the discipline’s self-discovery as a historical phenomenon which cannot be adequately understood (anymore) in terms of a traditional history of a scientific discipline (such histories would be called *A History of Translation Studies*) but has to be situated within a broader framework of the history of knowledge. Should this be the case, then D’hulst and Gambier have provided translation studies with a new research field and a new possibility to understand itself. And indeed, as the editors explain in their programmatic introduction, their declared aim is to “start ‘historicising’ modern translation studies” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 3) by reconstructing the “origins of translation studies” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 10) in terms of a “history of modern translation knowledge” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 10).¹ Such an endeavour has no equal in translation studies, not in aim, scope or magnitude. This alone is laudable and deserves appreciation. However, it poses a problem for a review. It can only dream of doing justice to such an undertaking in its entirety, especially to all contributions – all written by experts on each subject. That is why the reviewers have decided to only give synoptic descriptions of each of the seven parts the volume is divided into with the aim to assess their general contribution to the overarching theme and goal of the

¹ All quotations in the main text refer to the reviewed publication.

volume. But in order to do so, we first need to ask: Why, according to the editors, is the endeavour of historicising translation studies necessary in the first place?

Lieven D'hulst and Yves Gambier are quite clear in this regard. Its necessity does not solely result from perceiving a gap in the research landscape of translation studies, although that too certainly plays a role when noting that, especially in comparison with the histories of other disciplines, “[...] the history of translation studies is still in its infancy [...]” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 2). In fact, the true cause of the editors’ interest in a history of translation studies is the discipline’s dysfunctional relationship with its own past. D’hulst and Gambier quite rightly observe an ‘archival’ approach to ‘older’ theories, ideas or methods, treating them as something to be preserved, but without any “living connections with present ideas and challenges and of course with future prospect [...]” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 2). This archival approach rests on an arbitrary distinction between two distinct phases in the history of translation studies: between a ‘pre-scientific’ and a ‘scientific’ one starting (roughly speaking) in the 1970’s. It might be added, that said distinction is commonly repeated within the ‘scientific’ phase: Also vital to the current self-understanding of translation studies is the distinction between a ‘linguistic’ and a ‘post-linguistic’ phase – a distinction as questionable as the aforementioned one. The need for historicisation thus emerges from a problematic self-conception of the field which the editors hope to correct by introducing a ‘dialogical’ relationship with its own history. According to D’hulst and Gambier, such a relationship does not depend upon foregrounding discontinuities and binaries such as “prescriptive vs. descriptive viewpoints, non-academic vs. academic institutions, Western vs. non-Western worldviews, practice-driven vs. theory-driven research, etc.” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 3). Instead, the commonalities and continuities between past and present are to be appreciated and accounted for, because “[...] these elements have indeed greatly contributed to the elaboration of what has come to be known today as the field of translation studies (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 3). The positive integration of the past, however, is not an end itself. The editors do not call for an ‘antiquarian’ form of history in Nietzsche’s sense. In fact, in their view historical self-reflection can be productive: By unearthing premises of past and present that are shared and taken for granted, new research perspectives can open up and thus improve “present and future thinking about translation” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 3). In this sense, the book’s purpose is not to contribute to the ‘emancipation’ of translation studies from its past, but rather from its current view of its own past, and thus from itself. But how does it do that? And how do the essays contained in the volume contribute to that end?

As already mentioned, the historicisation of translation studies is supposed to be accomplished by reconstructing its origins in terms of a history of knowledge and not in terms of a traditional history of a specific scientific field. This approach explicitly draws on a field of historical research dealing with the history of knowledge, a field prominently represented, for instance, by Peter Burke. The concept of knowledge associated with this approach and employed by D’hulst and Gambier is broader than the concept of scientific knowledge: As an umbrella term for all forms of knowledge, its scope ranges from implicit, practical knowledge to explicit, theoretical knowledge.

From this vantage point, the editors propose a decidedly tentative and preliminary notion of ‘translation knowledge’ which serves as a common conceptual bracket for the volume’s different parts. They are keen to emphasize that it does not (solely) refer to any of the subdomains of translation studies, such as translation theory and methodology. As already suggested, it encompasses all possible forms of knowledge related to translation. These do not only include explicit and written down forms of translation knowledge produced and used in academic contexts of the present, such as translation studies. It includes implicit, practical forms of knowledge and does not differentiate between academic/non-academic and past/present knowledges. This way, forms of translation knowledge, which have previously been omitted by translation studies and history, can be addressed and related to various analytical categories: Knowledge about or on translation, but also knowledge of translation (translatorial know-how, awareness of translation taking place) can be studied in relation with the *agents* involved in translation knowledge (re)production, transmission, storage, etc.; the *techniques* of knowledge generation and structuring; the *media* of knowledge distribution; the institutional and symbolic spaces of knowledge production and usage and many more categories. In order to give such a vast undertaking a coherent structure, the editors have divided the book into seven parts which are supposed to reflect the “processes that make up modern translation knowledge” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 3): ‘Generating knowledge’ (Part 1), ‘Mapping knowledge’ (Part 2), ‘Internationalising knowledge’ (Part 3), ‘Historicizing knowledge’ (Part 4), ‘Analysing knowledge’ (Part 5), ‘Disseminating knowledge’ (Part 6), and ‘Applying knowledge’ (Part 7). They each contain five to ten chapters of varying length on different aspects of their main topic.

Part 1 (“Generating knowledge”) promises to deal with the “way people worldwide, since the remote past until the present, have constructed concepts and tools to understand and describe translation and how they have attached symbolic meaning and values to acts of translating” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 17).² For the most part, the essays in this part contribute to the goal of the volume by demonstrating the historical dependency of translation knowledge upon pre- or non-scientific modes of representing translation. Among other things, the reader is informed about the historical cultural variability of the concept of translation (Gambier), figurative uses of language conditioning our thinking about translation (e.g. metaphors such as bridge building and crossing a river) (St. André), religious myths such as ‘Babel’ and ‘Pentecost’ articulating basic and enduring attitudes towards language and translation (Placiat). Moreover, not only the historical and cultural genesis of translation knowledge is addressed. Also, the social conditions of generating knowledge about translation (Robinson) as well as the political function of representations of translation are investigated (Sakai). In sum, part 1 instructively conveys basic knowledge about the ‘rootedness’ of translation knowledge in historical contexts.

² A book devoted exclusively to this topic is announced to be published very soon: GAMBIER, Yves & STECCONI, Ubaldo (eds.) (2019): *A World Atlas of Translation*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins (*Benjamins Translation Library* 145).

Part 2 (“Mapping”) investigates “some of the ways by which knowledge on translation has been organized and channelled” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 101). It particularly focuses on material and technological, but also institutional conditions of mapping (and spreading) translation knowledge. Particularly interesting insights concern, for example, the impact of print technology not only on the dissemination of translated knowledge, but also on the possibilities of making translation an object of reflection by fixating texts, thus making the wording of the source and the target text reliably comparable (Bachleitner). Furthermore, the description of present forms of storing and organizing and ‘sharing’ translation knowledge on social media platforms, websites, blogs, wikis and databases of aligned bilingual corpora gives a glimpse of the current media-technological conditions of producing and transferring translation knowledge (Folaron). One form of transfer especially worth mentioning is the transfer of *institutions* in which translation knowledge is produced (D’hulst): The adaptation of journal formats, research structures and other infrastructures such as master and doctoral programs could be an interesting object for a sociology of translation knowledge. In this sense, part 2 represents a valuable initial contribution to raising translation studies scholars’ awareness about material, discursive and institutional paths their knowledge about translation has been taking.

Part 3 (“Internationalising knowledge”) aims to answer the question on how knowledge on translation crosses borders – political borders, linguistic borders, cultural borders. Again, it is not translation as an agent of internationalising knowledge that is considered, but the internationalisation of translation knowledge and its discursive and institutional ways as well as its technological and political conditions. The articles in part 3 approach the topic of internationalising knowledge from various angles. They either focus directly on the socio-political context of the historical emergence and development of translation studies (Tymoczko), its institutions (Gambier), and the forms of dissemination of translation knowledge (Assis Rosa); or they discuss the relationship between translation knowledge and internationality – be it by addressing the problem of ‘Eurocentrism’, i.e. the generalisation of culture-specific translation knowledge (van Doorslaer); by analysing the current global conditions of knowledge production and circulation (Cronin); by relating the history of translation knowledge to the religious, philosophical and political notions of universal language or be it by disclosing the yet under-researched field of political translation knowledge relevant in the coordination of international relations and multilingual empires or nations (Meylaerts). Part 3 presents the reader with a comprehensive outlook on the history of translation studies from the point of view of internationalisation, demonstrating how important it is to consider socio-political contexts when trying to understand the history of translation studies.

The title “Historicizing knowledge” might lead the reader to expect to witness historicizing of translation knowledge in action. However, part 4 is dedicated, as the introduction points out, to historical approaches of *structuring* knowledge. The eight contributions mainly present different historiographical methods that have already proven to be fruitful for translation historians or deemed to have potential such as comparative history, connected history and *histoire croisée*, oral history, memory

studies, counterfactual history. In the opening chapter on the theoretical issue of temporality (cf. Wakabayashi's article in this issue of *Chronotopos*), Rundle sheds light on the respective debates in history 'proper' and shows why it is important to continuously reflect upon the basic categories that shape the knowledge gained from research. This thought is also reflected in Wakabayashi's article on connected history and *histoire croisée* since the historicization of categories such as nation, society, colonial, indigenous, periphery, modern and tradition is an integral part of these approaches. Kujamäki follows with observations on the conditions for historical research and challenges translation historians encounter regularly: the information we seek is archived, but well hidden. Recapitulating, the chapter raises a few points about the way modern translation scholars do translation history that deserve special attention: Translation historians share an "*a priori* interest in translation, a synchronic category which is the premise and defining principle of their research" (RUNDLE 2018: 240). They research translation phenomena in different times and places and in connection with particular issues, an approach that Valdeón describes as referential. But, as he points out, translation studies could do more since it "has now accumulated a sufficiently large body of knowledge to justify both referential and integral comparative studies" (VALDEÓN 2018: 257).

Part 5 ("Analysing knowledge") presents ten contemporary analytical practices in translation studies. Particularly the longer contributions give sound descriptions of how these practices evolved and how these techniques can be used to gather data. The link to the *knowledge* gathered this way is mostly implicit, which makes Stefanink's and Bălăcescu's depiction of how Hermeneutics led to a new conception of "text" or the "translator's task" stand out. The same is true for Tahir Gürçağlar's reference to translation critique being the first form of theorizing about translation in ancient Greek and Roman discourse and how translated texts continue to inform our thinking on translation.

Part 6 ("Disseminating Knowledge") is devoted to fields and disciplines that have shared knowledge with translation studies.³ On a par with the two closing contributions of part 5 on "sociological models and translation history" and "feminism, gender and translation", this chapter breaks down the history of the discipline and its research foci and explains how shifts and turns came about. The editors point out that for the purpose of this book, dissemination encompasses the exchange between disciplines and the circulation of ideas as well as 'global' knowledge production. The role of translation as a disseminating tool that transforms 'local' knowledge is put aside. Vanderpitte et al. (on "Linguistics") and Delabastita (on "Literary research") deliver on a claim made by the editors at the outset of the book: They enter into a 'dialogical' relationship with the discipline's own history and the "prescientific" discourse on translation.

³ Concerning this topic, also see: GAMBIER, Yves & VAN DOORSLAER, Luc (2016): *Border Crossings. Translation Studies and other Disciplines*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins (*Benjamins Translation Library* 126).

Part 7 on “Applying Knowledge” foregrounds “domains in which translation is considered a tool to access knowledge, and applied knowledge in particular” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 407). The evolution of institutionalisation of training and didactic approaches (by Hurtado Albir with Laviosa linking it to language learning) takes a central role, complemented by Angelelli’s contribution on “assessment”, which only touches upon criticism on translation from centuries past and focusses on the contributions of translation studies to the discourse on translation quality, particularly regarding teaching and testing.

All in all, *A History of Modern Translation Knowledge* is an ambitious and important contribution to the on-going self-reflection of translation studies. The sheer effort alone, to organize and coordinate such an undertaking deserves respect and recognition. Like no other publication in the field, it highlights the relevance of a historical perspective beyond the confines of a sub-discipline. The historicisation of translation studies concerns all research efforts within translation studies, as their knowledge production takes place within historically grown institutional settings, making use of cognitive tools handed down by specific traditions. Becoming aware of the historicity of one’s own scientific practice is vital, because – in the end – it contributes to a more adequate recognition of the research object in question, as one is less prone to take basic concepts, theories, and presuppositions for granted.

Precisely because the aim of the book is so valuable for the discipline – also in terms of institutionalisation and interdisciplinary recognition – a few critical remarks are in place. These remarks concern problems of form and content and seem to result from a tension between two rather different intentions expressed by the editors in their general introduction: On the one hand, the volume is announced as a “sourcebook for master students, beginning PhD-students and established scholars who wish to engage in historical research or who want to be accurately informed on the history of the ideas, concepts, methods, interdisciplinary exchanges that have shaped the field of modern translation studies” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 11-12). This description suggests that the reader can expect a basic introduction into the various topics contained in the volume. On the other hand, the editors aspire to do something that has not been done before: to present a history of translation studies which overcomes traditional self-conceptions of the field expressed, for instance, in distinctions between a ‘scientific’ and ‘pre-scientific’ phase. The tension consists in simultaneously wanting to *represent* and to *disclose* a new research field. It manifests itself in various interconnected ways within the volume’s individual essays. First, in a discrepancy in length and function: Some chapters are only a couple of pages long and do not go beyond a general description of their topic or an overview of the current state of research. Others are lengthy in comparison and constitute original research. This way, the character of the contributions varies between – perfectly useful – handbook articles and fully-fledged analyses. Second, in a repeated lack of explicit connection with the overarching theme of translation knowledge: Although generally instructive in themselves, quite a few articles leave it to the reader to link their content to the main topic and aim of the book (perhaps because all research in the humanities and social sciences can be said to somehow deal with ‘knowledge’, the connection was felt to be

self-explanatory). It is conspicuous how rarely the term ‘translation knowledge’ or its concept are actually used in the individual contributions. And third, the ‘dialogue’ with past knowledges about translation is rather sporadic in the sense that usually the focus lies on the last few decades of the discipline, less on the origins of translation studies or the centuries preceding it. Maybe abstaining from the double-function of representing and disclosing a new research field could have prevented these problems.

Lieven D’hulst and Yves Gambier hope “that a solid framework is set, enabling future generations of translation scholars to start rediscovering, acknowledging and studying the complex history of their discipline” (D’HULST & GAMBIER 2018: 12). Indeed, with *A History of Modern Translation Knowledge* they and the contributors have created the necessary conditions for the further self-discovery of translation studies. Perhaps the systematic work on the concept of translation knowledge and its stronger connection to the tradition of the history and sociology of knowledge is an endeavour which could help to further solidify the proposed framework. Until then, it is the hope of the reviewers, that this publication will meet its deserved reception.