

## TRANSLATION STUDIES

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# Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies

**Abstract:** The article deals with the relation between translation studies and linguistics, in particular applied linguistics. Some facts from the history of translation studies and applied linguistics are presented (James Holmes's famous paper delivered at the III International Congress of Applied Linguistics, the beginnings of the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Warsaw University). A few definitions of applied linguistics and translation studies are discussed. In conclusion the author's view on the status of translation studies is expounded.

**Keywords:** translation, applied linguistics, translation studies.

In 1972 at the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics James Holmes delivered his famous paper entitled "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies", in which he established the name of the discipline and classified it as an empirical discipline, as such having two major objectives:

- to describe particular phenomena in the world of our experience,
- to establish general principles by means of which they can be explained and predicted.

Holmes also divided translation studies into "pure" and applied (Holmes 2000: 176). He did not, however, state that translation studies was a subdiscipline of applied linguistics. He delivered his lecture at a congress of applied linguistics because translation conferences at that time were very scarce (and translation departments or faculties – practically non-existent).

In the same year 1972 the Institute of Applied Linguistics was founded at the University of Warsaw. The Institute trains future teachers, translators and interpreters. Each student follows courses in two foreign languages (at present out of 7: English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Swedish and Japanese) and two specializations: foreign language teaching and translation. Thus, the name of the Institute and its curriculum might suggest an idea that applied linguistics contains those two main branches: language teaching and translation.

What is really the relationship between applied linguistics and translation studies? Let us first look at some dictionary definitions. In the “Introduction” to *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (Richards et al. 1992) its authors inform that

This dictionary includes the core vocabulary of both language teaching and applied linguistics. [...]

For the purposes of this book, “applied linguistics” refers to the practical applications of linguistics and language theory, and includes terms from the following areas of study:

- introductory linguistics, including phonology, phonetics, syntax, semantics and morphology
- discourse analysis
- sociolinguistics, including the sociology of language and communicative competence
- psycholinguistics, including first and second language acquisition, contrastive analysis, error analysis and learning theories (Richards et al. 1992: vii)

It would seem that for the authors of the dictionary language teaching and applied linguistics are two separate disciplines (Translation is not mentioned). On the other hand, the entry “applied linguistics” contradicts the above statement:

applied linguistics

1. the study of second and foreign language learning and teaching. [sic!]
2. the study of language and linguistics in relation to practical problems, such as lexicography, translation, speech pathology, etc. Applied linguistics uses information from sociology, psychology, anthropology, and information theory as well as from linguistics in order to develop its own theoretical models of language and language use, and then uses this information and theory in practical areas such as syllabus design, speech therapy, language planning, stylistics, etc. (Richards et al. 1992: 19)

In the second subentry translation is mentioned as a “practical problem” – presumably dealt with by “the study of language and linguistics”.

The dictionary contains entries **translation** (“the process of changing speech or writing from one language [...] into another...”) and **translation equivalence** (“the degree to which linguistic units [...] can be translated into another language without loss of meaning”) (Richards et al. 1992: 389) but not “translation studies”. The definitions of translation and translation equivalence prove how little the authors have to say about translation. Even though the dictionary was first published in 1985, the ignorance of translation theory is appalling.

A corresponding Polish dictionary bears the title *Podręczny słownik językoznawstwa stosowanego* ('Desk dictionary of applied linguistics') and a subtitle "Dydaktyka języków obcych" ('Foreign language teaching') (Szulc 1984). In the introduction the author states that

Termin „językoznawstwo stosowane” rozumieć należy w tym kontekście w jego tradycyjnym, zaznaczonym w podtytule, ujęciu, tzn. jako zastosowanie badań językoznawczych do dydaktyki języków obcych. ("The term 'applied linguistics' should be understood in this context in its traditional, stressed in the subtitle, meaning, i.e. as applying linguistic research to foreign language teaching") (Szulc 1984: 5)

Consequently the dictionary contains no entries connected with translation. Only "machine translation" is mentioned in the entry **językoznawstwo stosowane** (applied linguistics):

Dział językoznawstwa zajmujący się możliwościami praktycznego zastosowania (np. w dydaktyce języków obcych lub informatyce) osiągnąć takich dyscyplin jak językoznawstwo, socjologia, socjolingwistyka, psychologia, psycholingwistyka, antropologia i in. [...]

W kręgu zainteresowań językoznawstwa stosowanego znajduje się również zagadnienie afazji, tłumaczenia maszynowego oraz telekomunikacji.

("A branch of linguistics dealing with practical application (e.g. in foreign language teaching or computer technology/information science) of the findings of such disciplines as linguistics, sociology, sociolinguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, anthropology and others. [...] The discipline is also interested in such problems as aphasia, machine translation and telecommunication.") (Szulc 1984: 104-105)

The definition seems to take it for granted that sociology, psychology or anthropology have no applied branches and therefore their findings have to be utilized by applied linguistics. Thus applied linguistics becomes some meta-discipline though its "fields of application" are rather narrow.

W. Grabe in an introductory article to *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (Kaplan 2002) defines applied linguistics as "a practice-driven discipline that addresses language-based problems in real-world contexts" (Grabe 2002: 10). Translation is mentioned as a "sub-field of study":

Applied linguistics generally incorporates or includes several further identifiable sub-fields of study: second language acquisition, forensic linguistics, language testing, corpus linguistics, lexicography and dictionary making, language translation, and second language writing research. (Grabe 2002: 11)

Two things deserve our attention: first, placing translation somewhere between language testing and second language writing, and the very phrase "language translation", which reveals lack of knowledge about the issue. One does not translate languages, one translates texts. The marginal position occupied by translation in such a vision of applied linguistics is well reflected by the size of contributions devoted to translation in the whole volume: there are two articles (one entitled

“Translation”, the other – “Interpretation”) occupying some 30 pages out of 630. Other sections of the book include: “The four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing”, “Discourse analysis”, “The study of second language learning”, “The study of second language teaching”, “Variation in language use and language performance”, “Bilingualism and the individual learner”, “Multilingualism in society”, “Language policy and planning”, “Language assessment and program evaluation”, “Technological applications in applied linguistics”. The last chapter contains two articles: “Directions in automated essay analysis” and “Computer-assisted language learning”. No mention of CAT tools or machine translation. All this very clearly shows that applied linguists either exclude translation from their field of interest or treat it as a far periphery of their discipline and usually do not say anything interesting about it.

Let us now look at the definitions provided by the most popular source of knowledge, Wikipedia:

Applied linguistics is an interdisciplinary field of linguistics which identifies, investigates, and offers solutions to language-related real-life problems. Some of the academic fields related to applied linguistics are education, psychology, communication research, anthropology, and sociology.

Major branches of applied linguistics include bilingualism and multilingualism, conversation analysis, contrastive linguistics, sign linguistics, language assessment, literacies, discourse analysis, language pedagogy, second language acquisition, language planning and policy, interlinguistics, stylistics, pragmatics, forensic linguistics and translation. (Wikipedia “applied linguistics”)

The second part of the definition seems to confuse disciplines with objects of study – different branches of linguistics, discourse and conversation analysis, pedagogy, stylistics and pragmatics on one hand, and literacies, second language acquisition, language planning and policy, translation on the other. It may be instructive to compare the definition with that of “translation studies”:

Translation studies is an academic interdiscipline dealing with the systematic study of the theory, description and application of translation, interpreting, and localization. As an interdiscipline, Translation Studies borrows much from the various fields of study that support translation. These include comparative literature, computer science, history, linguistics, philology, philosophy, semiotics, and terminology. (Wikipedia “translation studies”)

Curiously, the definition does not mention psychology, sociology or anthropology among the “fields of study that support translation”. It is also interesting to notice how both definitions formulate their genus proximum: “an interdisciplinary field of linguistics” and “an academic interdiscipline”.

I can understand the word “interdisciplinary” – “of or relating to more than one branch of knowledge” (*The New Oxford Dictionary of English*), where “of” probably means “belonging to”. I am not sure whether I understand the word “interdiscipline”. Traditional dictionaries do not

contain this entry. Is it a discipline after all? An “interdisciplinary discipline”? A definition from Wikipedia does not help much:

The term interdiscipline [...] means an organizational unit that involves two or more academic disciplines, but which have [...] the formal criteria of disciplines such as dedicated research journals, conferences and university departments. It is related to interdisciplinarity, but it is a noun used for a certain kind of unit (academic discipline). As shown in the example of demography below a field may be both a discipline and an interdiscipline at the same time. The example of information science demonstrates that a field may be regarded as a discipline in some countries but an interdiscipline in other countries. (Wikipedia “interdiscipline”)

This pseudo-definition does not answer our question. In fact, it does not answer any questions. We are still left with our query concerning the status of translation studies and its relationship with applied linguistics.

What are the criteria of acknowledging that a field of study is an independent academic discipline? First of all it should have a serious, important, complex and complicated object of study. Is translation such an object? It is definitely serious and important. We are surrounded by translations – they are everywhere. We read translated books and documents, web pages and user’s manuals, we watch translated films and TV programmes, play translated games, listen to translated news from other countries. Most of our knowledge of the world comes from translations. So, after a moment of thought, we have to admit that translations are important and omnipresent. But is translation complex and complicated? Recently I have kept repeating I. A. Richards’ words: “Translation may very probably be the most complex event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos” (Richards 1953: 250). I keep repeating them because they are very true and because hardly anybody realizes the complicated nature of translation. Most people believe that translating is about replacing words from one language with their dictionary equivalents from the other language (cf. the “definition” of translation in *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* quoted above). Translation is not replacing words with other words. Translation consists in reproducing the mental structures signalled by text A in language a, and then producing text B in language b that will make it possible for users of language b to reproduce as much of those mental structures as possible. Merely to understand what translation really is one needs to practise (preferably to practise and study) it for a few years. In order to become a professional translator more years of practice (preferably of practice and study) are needed.

Thus, we have a serious, important, complex and complicated object of study. We have thousands of scholars dealing with it. We have academic departments, numerous conferences, journals, plenty of students eager to study translation. In my opinion it is enough to recognize translation studies as an independent academic discipline. Does the word independent mean that it has no contacts with other disciplines, that it does not owe anything to other fields of study? Of course not. There are no such disciplines in contemporary “interdisciplinary” world. Translation studies

definitely draws on psychology, sociology, anthropology, literary studies, philosophy... And obviously on linguistics. This “dependence” on other fields of study made some scholars sceptical as to the prospects of the discipline:

Thus one of the main problems with the scientific investigation of translation seems to lie in the fact that not only linguistic factors, but many other factors need to be taken into account. Since these factors belong to a variety of different areas of life, there is a question whether a comprehensive account of translation in the form of a coherent and homogeneous theory can ever be achieved. (Gutt 1991: 5)

Gutt does not seem to realize that similar doubts could be voiced by representatives of all contemporary humanities. Science in general is becoming more and more interdisciplinary.

The fact that translation studies makes use of the findings of psychology, sociology, linguistics or computer science does not mean that it is (or should be) a subdiscipline of any of them. It is definitely not a subdiscipline of applied linguistics, because language is only one of the aspects of translation.

On the other hand, different inspirations result in different schools of translation studies. It is possible to distinguish at least five “trends” in the discipline: linguistic, psychological, sociological, literary and philosophical. The best known representative of the linguistic trend is J.C. Catford (1965). More recently the school is represented by A. Bogusławski (2013), who even uses the label “translatory linguistics”, and T. Krzeszowski (2016), whose approach is based on cognitive linguistics. The psychological school is represented by, inter alia, E.-A. Gutt (1991), making use of the relevance theory, and E. Tabakowska (1993). The best example of the sociological approach is the so-called descriptive translation studies with its most eminent representatives G. Toury (1995) and Th. Hermans (2007). Among numerous literary-oriented translation scholars I would like to mention E. Balcerzan (2010), A. Berman (1984), J. Brzozowski (2011). Philosophically-minded scholars deal with the so-called hermeneutics of translation, their best-known representatives being probably G. Steiner (1975) and R. Stolze (1994). All those schools compete and collaborate, all those trends overlap to some extent, since their object of study is the same – translation.

Because of the ever-growing significance and number of translations, because of the complicated and interesting nature of the mental processes involved in translating, translation studies is likely to attract more and more students and scholars and gain in importance.

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