

WHO CARES ABOUT TRANSLATION THEORY? (LATVIAN EXPERIENCE)

JĀNIS SĪLIS

Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, Latvia

Abstract. The article is a study of relations between translation theory or, to be more precise – theoretical and applied translation studies and translation practice (i.e., regular work of translation professionals) with a glimpse into the views of some prominent translation theorists and afterwards provides a general picture of opinions of novice translators, experienced professional translators and translation studies experts in Latvia. The feeling is that in ‘real life’ there is a wide gap between the assessment of translation theory and practice in the eyes of several groups of persons relevant to the phenomenon of translation. A deeper survey and analysis of its results shows that the range of opinions is very wide among both translation theorists and practitioners. The pivotal question of this study is to find out who are of those who care (or do not care) *about* translation theory and who are those who care *for* translation theory. Is translatology as a research discipline a necessary complement to translation practice, or is it a testing site for ever more sophisticated translological schools?

Key words: theoretical and applied translation studies, translation/interpreting practice, self-taught translators/interpreters, translation scholars/theorists, professional translator/interpreter training programmes

INTRODUCTION

Nine years ago (21 September 2012), the author was a witness to a dialogue between the world-famous translation scholar José Lambert and a young lady – a civil servant representing the EU Directorate-General for Translation. The dialogue occurred during the discussion part of the 2012 September 11–13 Riga Technical University conference *Meaning in Translation: Illusion of Precision*. The EU Directorate-General for Translation representative, performing her duty in good faith, made a routine advertising presentation of her institution. When she finished, José Lambert asked a question related to her speech. The young lady looked at him and then inquired ‘Would you kindly give your name so we could give you a written answer?’. The shocked renowned translologist, who evidently thought that his personality and appearance were known to absolutely everyone

dealing with translation and interpreting on any level – theoretical, practical and administrative – remained silent for quite a while and then muttered, ‘Oh, it does not matter ...’. This situation is a vivid illustration of how wide the gap between translation studies and institutionalised translation practice is.

Viable theories begin with questions identifying problems in practical (professional) activities. In translation studies/translatology (TS), the beginning was a spontaneous evaluation of the quality of a translated text – a literary text in the case of potentially widest readership; at present such evaluation is also embracing the non-literary general language and special language (LSP) texts. Emotional reactions in the cases of literary translation could range from ‘What a crap!’ to ‘An excellent job!’. With this outburst of emotions, usually ‘the case was closed’.

However, there have always been nagging people among the readership who tried to understand (at least for themselves or a limited circle of persons sharing the same views) the reasons why a concrete translation was good or bad. Gradually the question ‘why?’ was asked to explain the emotional ‘yes’ or ‘no’. As seen from the development of the global translational thought in the course of millennia, the chain of evaluation criteria could have started with amateurishly stating what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in the case of a translated text. One of the conclusions was ‘good is precise’ and ‘bad is imprecise and superficial’. After some time, the realisation came that the notions ‘precise’ and ‘imprecise’ are as subjective as ‘good’ and ‘bad’. This actually was the shift from the field of subjective speculations to the need for practicing translators/interpreters to establish working models of precision in order to avoid a loss of professional face, which in reality meant the loss of clients and money.

From that moment on, ‘precise’ underwent changes in opposite pairs of notions, at first ‘invented’ by translators themselves: *word-for-word vs. free translation – translation equivalence – adequate translation* (as a response to the failure of defining the notion of *equivalence*). The search for equivalence turned from the central problem into a blind alley, and refuge was (seemingly?) found in discarding equivalence as such and the start of a new approach (Manipulation school of Theo Hermans).

Already in 1985, Komissarov admitted that

[...] the considerable achievements of translation theory are seldom fully appreciated by the people who earn their living by practicing the noble art of translation. It seems that many translators have little use for theoretical principles, even though they may occasionally pay tribute to translation theory either out of politeness or in order to win additional prestige for their profession [...] it should be noted that theoretical findings are not always directly applicable. (Komissarov, 1985: 208)

Komissarov also concludes that ‘translation theory is not supposed to provide the translator with ready-made solutions of his problems. Theory is no substitute for proper thinking or decision-making’ (ibid.).

Justifying the teaching of translation theory, Pym is convinced that ‘translators are theorizing whenever they translate’ and that ‘theorization is an important part of translation practice’ (2003: 492).

In his publication *Redefining Translation Competence in an Electronic Age*, Pym analyses the role of theory in translation practice and explains ‘translating as a process of producing and selecting between hypotheses, and this is in itself a mode of constant theorization. If thought through, the model is actually claiming that translators are theorizing whenever they translate; theorization is an important part of translation practice (Pym, 2003: 492). Pym’s ‘selecting between hypotheses’ can be characterised as a practical decision-making process that is axiomatic in any process of translation and interpreting. Therefore, one should not interpret the translation process as constant theorisation, the choice between several translation theories, but as an operative choice between two or several ways of translation.

Arrojo (2013) also supports the view that translators cannot ignore translation theory: in the aftermath of World War II has been the institutionalization of translation studies as the new academic field formally devoted to translation scholarship and translator training that began opening up spaces in universities worldwide in the 1970s.

Due to the increasing awareness of the productive role of translators, translation theory has become pivotal for the humanities in general, producing trailblazing scholarship in interfaces with areas such as cultural studies, postcolonial and subaltern studies, gender studies, philosophy, sociology, comparative literature, and history [...] translators are not usually required to have any formal academic training in order to become professionals and, thus, often tend to see theory as irrelevant. In this scenario it is fundamental that we rethink the opposition and find ways to bridge the usual gap that separates practice from what is generally called theory. (Arrojo, 2013: 12)

There are other opinions declaring that translation theory *per se* is worth of interest, but it is not particularly relevant for practicing translators. According to Chesterman, theoretical input should be perceived as something providing conceptual tools that help the translator’s decision-making efforts (Chesterman and Wagner, 2002: 7). Wagner pragmatically suggests interpreting translation theory as a toolkit of theoretical concepts, and in her opinion, this toolkit simply names processes that good translators follow instinctively. Chesterman and Wagner characterize it as a professional *lingua franca* in which translators can talk about translation (ibid.: 11).

Translatologists have also expressed their opinions about the role of translation theory in the process of translator training.

Offering a synopsis of researcher Klaudy’s (2006) views, a conclusion can be made that she is not so much interested in the role of translation theory in the professional activities of ‘self-made’ translators but focuses on the translator

training process and recommends a selective approach to the numerous theoretical schools choosing only such theoretical material that corresponds to the specific needs of the training process. Klaudy also believes that translation theories historically originated from translator training needs. It seems that this is a rather rash conclusion: if we take into consideration the opinions of, for example, Cicero or St. Jerome – their point of view, first and foremost, could be perceived as personal reflections of what would be the best way how to approach translation. Klaudy's approach could be applied to the time span of the last hundred years. As for the present-day situation, one could still agree with her that professional translators are not motivated to generalise (Klaudy, 2006: 1–3).

Shuttleworth (2001: 499) maintains that there should be a distinction between a formal theory that should be an instrument for translational research and a certain amount of logically bound theory-related viewpoints, which could serve as a foundation that could help a beginner translator to start his/her decision-making 'chain' in the process of translation:

While recognizing the need to provide students with a solid theoretical grounding, translation instructors should place strategic importance on equipping their students with the skills that will help them to enter and, subsequently, survive on the translation market. That is not to say that teaching translation theory is to be abandoned altogether. Rather, translator training curricula should be modified to accommodate both practical and theoretical aspects of a translator's work [...]. (Szczyrbak, 2011: 80)

Szczyrbak (*ibid.*) characterises another Polish translation scholar, Pieńkos, as being convinced that knowledge of being familiar with translation basics alone is not enough for a beginning translator to reach the level of a skilled professional; it still provides rules that serve as guidelines of a novice translator's performance (Pieńkos, 2003: 72).

Lederer points out that 'translation is a complex operation and theory helps in generalizing and systematizing problems', but basically, her conviction is that she does not believe in separate general theories for explaining the process of written translation and oral interpreting (Lederer, 2007: 15–35).

THE ROAD TO ESTABLISHING TRANSLATION STUDIES IN LATVIA

Somewhere in the process of finding the way to formulate a definition of translation studies that could satisfy everyone, the problem became of a lesser interest to translators who continued to rely upon their personal intuition and experience. The search was continued by those who were translators-practitioners with curiosity to find some more general explanation that could help them solve practical problems in the translation process (here, some examples of such cases in Latvia should be mentioned). Little by little Latvian translators who predominantly were

previous graduates of the University of Latvia (in the Soviet period, it was named Pēteris Stučka Latvia State University Awarded with Red Banner Order of Labour) Foreign languages faculty programmes of English, German, French and Russian linguistics and literature, started pedagogical and research activities, abandoned practical translation for the sake of linguistic and literary research.

Classification of scientific disciplines adopted by the Academy of Sciences of Latvia states that the discipline of linguistics has 12 subdisciplines, including applied linguistics as well as comparative and contrastive linguistics (*Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 2018).

Research in translation studies was found appropriate to be included in the comparative and contrastive linguistics subdiscipline; unlike the situation in a number of other countries, translatology is not considered to be an independent, interdisciplinary science.

Before obtaining concrete answers from 7 groups of persons in some ways connected with the phenomenon of translation, the author formulated a hypothesis: 'pure' practical translators (not to be confused with James Holmes' 'pure translation studies') of both literary and non-literary texts have adopted a pragmatic (matter-of-fact) approach, and there is a feeling they do not find translation theory/theories helpful in their professional job; however those translators who simultaneously work in the academic field, feel the obligation to choose translation studies as their research themes.

One can say that there are no 'pure' translation theorists in Latvia without ties with the academic world – here, they simply could not make a living.

Here is more about each respondent group answering the question 'Has translation theory any importance for practising professional translators?'

CHARACTERISATION OF THE RESPONDENT GROUPS

1 SELF-TAUGHT TRANSLATORS

All translators in Latvia before 1995 (when the first translator training programme was implemented at the University of Latvia) learned how to translate simply by doing it. One could speak about sporadic episodes of translators' contact with theoretical issues: these were improvised seminars of the Writers Union's translators' section where more experienced translators analysed the translations done by beginners. At the end of the seventies of the 20th century, the University decided that a two-semester lecture course in translation theory and practice was needed for students of the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Lectures were read in Latvian for the students of Latvian language and literature speciality and in English for the students of English language and literature (Silis and Zālīte, 1984); it is not very clear whether such a course was read for the students of German language and literature, but there is a teaching aid that was published for students of this specialisation (Veinerte, 1991). Concerning the students of the French language and literature, no course of this kind was

offered; some theoretical aspects were mentioned in practical translation classes. All the members of the academic staff engaged in reading translational lecture courses were linguists or literary scientists who, at the same time, were experienced translation professionals able to provide useful tips for the beginners.

2 TRANSLATORS WHO HAVE RECEIVED PROFESSIONAL TRAINING ON A BACHELOR AND/OR MASTER LEVEL

Translators and interpreters in Latvia are trained in professional, professional Bachelor and professional Master programmes study programmes at public universities and universities of applied sciences founded by the government, as well as several private higher education establishments (Silis, 2009: 263–281).

3 ACADEMICS TEACHING TRANSLATION-RELATED SUBJECTS IN PRACTICAL CLASSES

These are Professors, Associate and Assistant Professors, as well as Lecturers teaching theoretical and applied lecture courses in the discipline of translation studies and conducting practical translation and interpreting classes at the aforementioned higher education establishments.

4 TRANSLATION SCHOLARS WHO SIMULTANEOUSLY ARE PRACTICING TRANSLATORS

In Latvia, this is a typical combination. The first teacher trainers were the older generation of experienced 'self-taught' translators and interpreters; they taught the students of translator training Bachelor and Master programmes who, in many cases, after receiving the Master degree became colleagues of their teachers and are in the process of doing their doctoral research in translation studies, comparative and contrastive or applied linguistics.

5 'PURE' TRANSLATION SCHOLARS (WHO ARE) TEACHING TRANSLATION STUDIES AS A THEORETICAL DISCIPLINE

Usually, these are academics who are Associate Professors or Professors. These teaching staff members in Latvia are not supposed to conduct practical classes in translation/interpreting – this is done mostly by Lecturers and Assistant Professors.

6 'PURE' TRANSLATION SCHOLARS ENGAGED SOLELY IN RESEARCH

In reality, there is no such group, at least not in Latvia. Here, one could probably speak about translationalists who are not actively translating and interpreting anymore or doing it rarely, as the author of this text.

7 RESEARCHERS IN DIFFERENT FIELDS OF SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY DEALING WITH TRANSLATION AS A PHENOMENON

At present, these are mainly IT experts, especially those dealing with developing Computer-aided translation (CAT) tools and Machine translation items. However, representatives of such research disciplines as linguistics (especially contrastive and applied studies), cultural studies, sociology, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, etc., should be mentioned here as well.

In order to have a better understanding of the translation-related context of the following survey of opinions about the necessity to have a certain amount of understanding of translation theory and applied issues, here is a brief survey of the development of translation studies as a research discipline in Latvia. A much more detailed description can be found in the last monograph of the author (Sīlis, 2019) and in the National Encyclopaedia electronic version entry *Translation Studies in Latvia* (Sīlis, 2021).

LATVIAN TRANSLATION STUDIES IN 1945–1991

First attempts to move closer to some theoretical issues could be observed in polemic articles displaying translation criticism – these were publications by the authors, which, in many cases, were writers and poets who had translated a number of texts, as well as experienced translators critically analysing the work of younger translators. Articles of this type could be found in periodicals meant for the general public; this was the period from approximately 1945 to 1965. Professional evaluation of translations was done in the Translation Section of the Latvian Writers' Union, which was founded in the second half of the 1940ies. Here seminars and meetings for (predominantly) beginning translators were organized to discuss the quality of translations.

Rudimentary translation 'criticism' in the daily press and the literary journal *Karogs* (*The Banner*) discussed the negative practice of word-for-word translation, mistakes in idiom translation, the importance of preserving the author's individual approach and style; problems of terminology used in translations, poetry translation, translation aids quality. The authors of these articles were professional translators, literary critics, and ideological 'supervisors' of the Communist Party organizations (Paklons, 1980; Blumberga, 2008).

Surprisingly, considerably more meticulous and philologically professional translational research was conducted by contrastive linguists of the academic world. However, this research was known only to a narrow circle of specialists, for translation studies at that time were thought to be irrelevant to translation practice. The first doctoral dissertation, or Candidate of Philology dissertation in Soviet research nomenclature, on translations of the Ancient Rome period, was defended at Leningrad State University by Assistant Professor Lija Čerfase of the Latvian State

University (Cherfas, 1950), another doctoral thesis on translation of Shakespeare's plays into Latvian was defended by Valda Beitāne under the title *Translation of Shakespeare's Tragedies into Latvian* (Beitāne, 1959). The author of the mentioned dissertation was a university lecturer and also a practicing translator who took part in the translation of the collected works of William Shakespeare. Assistant Professor of the Latvian State University Tamāra Zālīte's dissertation analysed some problems of translation of literary texts (Zalīte, 1967); Assistant Professor Imanta Celmrauga's Doctoral research was on linguistic parallels in a literary translation from German into Latvian, dissertation defended in the Latvian State University (Celmrauga, 1970). Zaiga Ikere wrote her Doctoral thesis on the principles of Latvian translation of philosophical terms and defended her work at Vilnius State University (Ikere, 1983). At the very end of the Soviet period in 1991, Ieva Zauberga defended her dissertation on the reflection of language dynamics in translations at the Academy of Sciences of Latvian SSR (Zauberga, 1991).

LATVIAN TRANSLATION STUDIES IN 1992–2020/2021

In the second half of the nineteen-eighties and the decades up to 1992/1993, Latvian translation studies were influenced by the Soviet translation schools and, to a less significant extent, by the views of some Czech and Bulgarian translation theorists. This influence shaped research directions and topics of Latvian researchers in translation theory and applied studies. A textbook, *Basic Problems of Translation Theory* for University students, was published in Riga (Silis and Zālīte, 1984). The publication touched upon several issues such as, for example, translation in the modern world, place and role of translation in world culture, translation genres (fiction, technical and science texts, journalism, advertisements, speeches and stage plays), the concept of equivalence, the problem of translatability, translation of vocabulary, phraseology and grammar, national peculiarities, author's system of metaphors, etc.

However, fundamental political changes caused a paradigm shift – reorientation of translation studies in Latvia towards a positive evaluation of the Western translational schools and establishing first contacts with Western translation scholars. The 1987–1993 shift from the Soviet translational paradigm to Western views, combining interlinguistic and intercultural interpretations of translation, culminated in a peak of changes in 1992/1993.

Since 1991, activities in translation studies have developed in more than a dozen directions, quantitatively the most productive being intercultural or cross-cultural issues, issues of 'pure' translation studies (both theoretical and descriptive), target language translation norms and standards, as well as translation of terminology.

Intercultural issues were the most widely researched domain at the beginning of the 1990s. There are productive authors who have analysed the interaction of the national and international, conducted research on problems of transference of

cultural background in translations, as well as pinpointed the culture imperatives of Latvian translation. A number of publications have displayed interest in the nature of translations as hybrid texts, viewing them as a natural consequence of crossing cultural barriers. The necessity for translation of ‘marginalised’ literature of small nations into major languages was explained by the fact that through translations into the major languages of the world assume the role of ‘gateways’ for minor literature.

Cross-cultural problems found in translations of advertising and promotion materials have been analysed, discussing the reciprocal influence of translation and culture, as well as language economy and semantic compression as characteristic of advertisement language. The impact of ‘Europeanisation’ of Latvian in translation and lexicography processes has been shown, and translation of realia in Latvian folk songs has been repeatedly examined.

The considerable interest of Latvian scholars in problems of translation studies is reflected in articles and textbooks on specific translation theory problems. Special attention was focused on rethinking the translator’s reliability, and it has been pointed out that translation is no longer regarded as a mere copy of the original; it is oriented towards the target audience, and because of this the translator/interpreter is no longer a mere reproducer. False friends problem since the beginning of the 1990s, has been at the centre of attention of linguists and translation scholars (Silis, 2013: 193–207).

In the period of 2015–2021, research in the main areas of study of the previous period is continued, but several new directions have been started. Here, a number of articles and books on the Latvian translation history written by Veisbergs (2016) should be mentioned; Silis (2019) has started to examine the history of translation studies in Latvia; linguistic and translational aspects of poetry translations is the field of research of Veckrācis (2020) and Dreijers (2014).

The bulk of world-scale publications where the necessity of translation theory knowledge for practicing translators is discussed deals with the translation studies’ component in translator and/or interpreter training BA and MA programmes.

TRAINING OF TRANSLATORS/ INTERPRETERS IN LATVIA

In the second half of the 1980ies and the beginning of the 1990ies, there were around 15–20 good self-taught interpreters in Latvia, as well as a somewhat larger number of good translators of non-literary texts. These individuals, who were philologists and linguists by education, were suddenly confronted in their translation and interpretation activities with completely new and unknown problems and terminology in domains totally unfamiliar to them – like economics and finance, business administration and law, environment problems and health care system details, politics and military terminology, etc.

The growth of Latvia's foreign contacts in the 1990ies demanded an explosive increase of translators and interpreters in government structures, in the big public monopolies, in local governments, in newly-created joint ventures, in companies now directly dealing with import and export. All these structures were in desperate need of an increasing scope of translation and interpreting services, but the majority of them were not sure where to look for professionals. Even if they knew, the number of professionals available would not have been sufficient. Therefore, many random people without any professional training, with insufficient source language and target language proficiency, became interpreters at companies and public institutions.

In 1995, the University of Latvia Faculty of Foreign Languages was the first higher educational structure in Latvia to respond to the changes in the market realities. This was not an easy task to accomplish because, in the previous decades, stress was laid mainly on the translation of fiction.

In 2009 translators and interpreters in Latvia were trained in 16 study programmes at 10 higher education establishments (3 universities and 3 university colleges founded by the government, as well as 4 private higher education establishments) – in 7 professional, 5 professional Bachelor and 4 professional Master programmes (Silis, 2009: 263–281). A number of programmes of predominantly private Higher Educational Establishments (HEIs) were closed after 2011; now (in 2021), Latvia has fewer translator and interpreter training programmes, but the quality has significantly improved.

It is interesting to assess the analysis of 67 European Master of Translation professional study programmes taught in 61 universities in 21 countries (Torres-Simón and Pym, 2017). Very scrupulous research has been done, but the author of this publication points out that it is almost impossible to make objective conclusions without proper background knowledge possessed by insiders. For example, authors of the before-mentioned analysis of the European Master of Translation (EMT) programmes have found out that 5 out of 67 programmes do not have translation theory courses in their curricula. Among them is the EMT of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, where the author was up to now reading a lecture and seminar course on research methods in translation studies. The course would be ineffective without students having had an introduction to linguistics, contrastive linguistics, and translation theory in the curriculum of their BA level translator and interpreter training programme; although there are Master students from other places in Latvia who, indeed, would have problems without the lack of theoretical knowledge, the overwhelming majority are graduates from the BA translator/interpreting programme. All the previous amount of theoretical knowledge helps the Master students to write their Master papers. The situation is different at the University of Latvia (3% of translation theory) and Riga Technical University (4% of translation theory), where many of the EMT students are BA graduates of some other scientific disciplines and therefore have not had translation studies in their curriculums. Probably this is the reason why the amount of theory is much more substantial (25%) in several other European EMT programmes, e.g., in Durham, Manchester, Mons, and Vrije Universities (*ibid.*).

EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATING OPINIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS TO THE QUESTIONS

1 OPINIONS OF TRANSLATORS OUTSIDE LATVIA

Ten years ago, a British Master programme student was collecting data with the aim of getting answers to the question: *Is translation theory useful to the practicing translator?* To make the respondents' answers more to the point, she added three more questions: 'Do you apply translation theory to your translation practice? If yes, which theories do you find useful and why? If no, why not?' (Griffiths, 2011).

Here are some of the positive and negative responses, illustrated by examples, simultaneously preserving the anonymity of respondents of all the seven groups. This part of the study should not be perceived as a quantitative linguo-statistical analysis; these are the author's reflections on the aggregate of respondents' answers. (The original written expression peculiarities and language mistakes have been preserved.)

Some examples of answers to the question *Is translation theory useful to the practicing translator?*:

Yes – 50%

'Practice without theory (framework of reference) is HOLLOW.'

'One of the main practical reasons for studying translation theory is to be able to discuss specific texts with other people in a common language.'

'[...] theory helped me to realise how much more i needed to learn and also to improve my translation process by paying more attention to areas that before were done intuitively.'

'I studied much translation theory for my MA in Translation Studies, and while I can't point to any direct effect, I do find sometimes that it makes me aware of things.'

No – 49%

'Not really, at least not directly.'

'Translation theory is an academic discipline [...] far removed from translation practice, which is a professional activity requiring professional training. [...] I have done two Master's degrees – one in Translation Studies [...] and in technical translation.'

'[...] I only recently started reading translation theory as part of my PhD studies, I do not believe that I would have been a better translator had I read all that 15 years ago.'

Other comments – 1%

'Translation theory might be helpful if you have never studied communication and/or psychology.'

'Theory vs. methodology – the field of "methodology" is relevant to both academics and practitioners.'

The certified translator of the American Translators Association, Riccardo Schiaffino, has asked a question *Can translators ignore theory?* in the internet site named *About Translation*, inviting his colleagues to comment on this question. In the introduction to the responses, he pointed out that one surely can translate having no knowledge of translation theory, but even if these translators find theory useless are still ‘following a translation theory of sorts’ (Schiaffino, 2011).

Here are some comments, illustrated by examples:

Yes – 5%

‘Theories add to the level of professionalism in this trade, not because we have snooty theories to wave about, but because we show that we are thinking about our work on a meta-level.’

No – 95%.

Other opinions:

The respondent writes that Fraser, in her webinar on translation theory for practitioners (Fraser, 2011), makes the point that ‘practitioners sometimes reject theory because they misunderstand what it is – it’s not a set a rules you have to follow [...], rather an explanation of certain aspects of what we do. [...]’ (ibid.).

2 OPINIONS OF TRANSLATORS – LATVIAN DATA

The author of this study has collected opinions of the 6 (7) groups mentioned above in ‘Characterisation of the Respondent Groups’; here again, one can get acquainted with the author’s reflections on the aggregate of respondents’ answers; the question remains the same: *Is translation theory useful to the practicing translator?* However, here and below, the author’s intention was not to ask for motivation of the opinions. (The original written expression peculiarities have been preserved in the answers.)

‘Self-taught’ translators:

Yes – 27.2 %

‘Translation theory is a good way to enrich the scope of translator’s methods. [...] Translation theory for me is more relevant to translation strategies [...].’

‘Translation theory is very important for my work. [...] there is difference e. g. between translation of literary texts and legal texts, and there are other problems that can be solved by the help of theory.’

‘For me as a historian and archaeologist differences between text types and terminology rendering methods are of great importance.’

Yes, but... – 36.3 %

‘One never learns by going through the motions on dry land. [...] The best way is some sort of association between theory and practice,

until the learner manages to mentally accept that theory and practice back each other up and combine to produce relative efficiency. Should translation theory be taught? Probably less than it is in university courses, and probably far less theoretically than it is in many cases.'

'Yes, theory cannot be ignored, but for me only such theoretical fields as text types and specific terminology are important.'

No definite opinion – 9%

'I have not used translation theory while translating.'

No – 27.2 %

'My creative spirit and my intuition help me instead of the knowledge of translation theory.' (This comment was written in very faulty Latvian, although the author, in addition to claiming himself to be a translator from his native language, added that he was also a prose writer, poet, and playwright).

'I taught translation theory for 25 years but as a practising translator myself, I'm still not convinced it is really useful.'

'From the practical point of view poetics and knowledge of Latvian history and culture are far more important for my translator's work than translation theory.'

An outstanding translator of literary texts from several languages into Latvian explained that in the translation process she used intuition, experience and knowledge of languages and cultures, but she always experienced deep satisfaction when her opinions and translatorial decisions corresponded to the theoretical conclusions found in translational publications.

Translators who have received professional training on a Bachelor and/or Master Level:

Respondents of this group were students of university-level professional Bachelor and Master programmes.

Here are the results of the survey of BA students when answering the question 'Can translators ignore theory translation theory and applied translation studies?':

Yes – 59 %

'I agree. I think that without knowing any theory it is still possible to translate, the only thing that is needed in order to translate is language skills and an understanding of a source text.'

'I completely agree with this statement because the ability to translate is tightly connected to the general knowledge of source and target languages, and we should also take into consideration linguistic intuition one might have.'

'I agree, I do not believe that the translated work will be great just because you know the theory of translation, maybe it will just help to deal with translation problems.'

Yes, but... – 27 %

‘Well, I think that one can still translate without knowing the translation theory, but then the translation probably won’t be as high quality.’

‘Without knowing of translation theory it is possible to translate, but translation will not be as good as with knowing theory of it. Because with knowing theory we can make our translations correct and logical.’

‘I think yes, but if there might be a case where the translation theory could come in handy, then knowing it would be better than not knowing. Also, knowing the translation theory one can become more aware of the things we should be aware of, such as, some culture specific aspects or something along the lines.’

Partly yes – 13 %

‘I partly agree. Without knowledge of the theory, a person can translate. But the translation will be at the amateur level.’

‘Partly agree, for it is definitely possible to do all sorts of things without knowing the theory (like repairing cars, cooking, exercising, sketching, etc.). Knowing the ins and outs of the respective subject’s theory sure helps to elevate the quality of the work. One can translate to some extent by only having good sense of language, however, theory enables deeper understanding and the decision-making in the process becomes conscious.’

No – 1%

‘To a claim that without knowing or being aware of translation theory one can still translate, I cannot agree. Everything and anything in life has legal relationships. It is possible, of course, but it will literally change the quality of the translation which is something the translator does not want to happen.’

Answers of MA students to the same question:

Yes – 14 %

‘Agreed, at a basic level translation does not require any special education or knowledge of theory, just knowledge of two languages.’

Yes, but... (the quality is lower) – 58%

‘Yes, everybody can try to translate and even someone thinks that he is good enough in translating/interpreting without any diplomas or regard to Translation Studies, but will that translation be good enough?’

‘Anyone can translate without knowing translation theory, however, they cannot produce a high-quality translation without having some understanding of translation theory.’

Partly yes – 14%

‘One can still translate without knowing the basics of translation theory, although a professional translator most likely has studied translation and translation theory before.’

No – 14%

‘I disagree, because different translation theories include various techniques, such as: literal translation, adaptation etc., thus each of them must be adapted to the process independently.’

Academics Teaching Translation-related Subjects in Practical Classes:

‘I am a graduate of both professional BA and MA programmes of translator/interpreter training. After that I started writing my Doctoral thesis in translation studies (terminology), but did not finish the process. Simultaneously for 19 years I was translating and interpreting, as well as teaching practical classes on the BA programme level as a translator/interpreter trainer. I think that when doing the job of a professional translator or interpreter, one could easily do without seeking immediate “down-to-earth” solutions in sophisticated theoretical schools of translatology. Much more effective would be to use the information of applied science character, like publications of coping tactics in simultaneous interpreting, or what translators in their professional slang call “salami principle”, when the source language sentence is extra-long and the only way to cope with it is to “slice” it into smaller parts, translate these shorter parts and then put the sentence together in the target language etc.’

Translation Scholars who Simultaneously are Practicing Translators:

Respondent 1:

‘Economy of time and effort. One can of course pick up the numerous points, approaches etc. by translating and consulting editors, angry clients, etc. But then one could approach in this way any sphere – one can become a doctor by practicing surgery on patients and seeing who survives better thus covering the whole experience and history of medicine. Or learn flying by trial and error.’

Respondent 2:

‘Translation theory is important for practising translators as it helps to make choices among strategies, finding the best one for a particular translation problem. It also gives confidence and provides metalanguage in speaking about one's choices and, if needs be, it is a good source for arguments for defending one's choices.’

Respondent 3:

‘I started to translate and interpret when there were no professional translation and interpreting training programmes in Latvia, so from this point of view I am a “self-taught” translator and interpreter. As such one I started with translation of different text types; doing that I did not feel that I could not cope with the tasks without any theory. Gradually a need arose to systematise the accumulated experience

and this resulted of becoming aware of problem fields discussed in translation theory. If such theoretical fundamentals have been found then these could be used as “crutches” – arguments to explain why I have translated this way and not that way. Sometimes theory provides quick solutions, but sometimes it acts like a brake – one must do some additional investigation, but that translation work is halted. Also, I would like to separate translation theory from translation criticism – this is my field of activity in addition to translating and being a university academic.’

Respondent 4:

‘Translation theory helps to develop meta-skills that are useful in pre-/while-/post-translating. By meta-skills, I refer to reflective and analytical skills that help translators explain their choices at different levels – for commissioners, for researchers, for other translators. (It would be like a comparison with doctors’ interaction either with patients, colleagues, medical researchers, media, etc.), because there are different approaches to translating a text (in light of, for example linguistic, feminist theories), various theories, assumptions guide translators’ decision-making. Because decision-making per se is an interdisciplinary phenomenon (cognitive, behavioural, cultural, psychological, linguistic), it is evident that various explanations (theories) underlie translation and translating. Possibly, we can ask several questions – what does theory do and how does it help translators in their practical everyday work? Does it improve or change the potential translation at its different stages of becoming a final end-product? Can different theories lead to different target texts? What is the difference between a professional translator (with less practice) and an amateur translator (without academic training in translation, but longer practice)? Do such amateurs translate worse than professionals (with academic education)? These are the questions that I happen to know an approximate answer to when reading reviews of translated literary texts. Variables (like time factors, linguistic change, cultural phenomena) seem to influence outcomes. I also think there are theoretical ideas that underpin real problems such as algorithmic solutions in improving CAT and machine translation; indispensably, one needs to integrate syntax, parsing, corpus methods, etc. for more effective operations. In sight interpreting, there are various foci on eye-tracking movements, also decision-making. In line with digitalization trends, there are realistic models stemming from abstract theories emerging. It is clear that practicing translators do not think constantly about, for instance, feminist translation theory, nevertheless, it might be an option to consider some literary and cultural texts and their translation in the context of the aforementioned theory. So, the theory might be a starting point to see translation as a system that is not rigid,

but quite open to change and criticism promoting discussion about the importance of translation, translators' role in society. My personal experience can be defined in quite simple terms, when I translate I do not apply theoretical concepts to translating, however, I do think about level shifts, terminological issues, grammatical problems - they are from theories but they do not dominate in abstract reasoning over my practice of translating. *Skopos*, pragmatic goals – I assume they are related to theories, and I am not ignoring them. Although the more you translate (let's say texts of the same genre, type), you start noticing algorithmic patterns, they can be a basis for testing existing theories. Theories do allow to discuss translation, and I assume they can influence translating. It is like saying – do professional musicians (when performing) think about the history of music, do surgeons (when operating) think about models of medical ethics. Theories may guide, you may choose a different path because you know that something is theoretically abstract which needs either refutation or confirmation. Disclaimer: by practicing professional translators I do not refer to undergraduate students who learn to translate, but those who really translate.'

Respondent 5:

'Theory, undoubtedly, plays a significant role in translator/interpreter training and professional development, because intuitive self-instruction without theoretical basis and methodological foundation is a burden in achieving appropriate results. Success of interpreters and translators lies in constant practice and regular interest in theoretical novelties – something that forms the methodological basis of the translation process, reveals essential principles, conditions and interconnections of translation process. Theoretical knowledge helps to shape translators' strategies and methods, skills of planning and optimizing translation tasks. Translator/interpreter has to have professional knowledge and skills to analyse next steps of work, to identify difficulties and mistakes, to find the best solution in the concrete situation. Theoretical knowledge makes the translation process more profound and complete.'

Respondent 6:

'Basically, when it comes to the question whether translation theory may really be of any use in translation practice the discussion reminds a similar issue – whether it is possible to teach creative writing, whether it is possible to actually become a writer. I'd say that the word in italics is a key aspect of consideration. I myself have made the whole way of becoming a translator both through academic studies and daily translation practice. I may easily assume that practice is what has led [to] the process but the contribution of academic reflection on translation is much more complicated to grasp, analyse and define. Nevertheless, I do believe that reflection, analytical thoughts on

the essence of translation, including different ways in which the process/procedures and product of translation are structured and classified, contribute towards more thorough insights and understanding and thus, both directly and indirectly, towards more prepared translation professionals, towards enhanced translation quality. Meanwhile, my observations regarding recent trends in Translation Studies raise certain concerns that academic reflection in this field leads into some type of pseudo-science. Issues and topics tend to become so distinctively specific, so intensely theoretical that they lose any relationship with what translation really is. I'm pretty much convinced that Translation Studies should remain a practice-focused and probably even practice-driven academic discipline.'

Respondent 7:

'I have not studied translation theory in any study programme and I have learned it in a self-instruction process beginning with year 2000 when I started to translate from Czech into Latvian and from Latvian into Czech. I believe that theory is undoubtedly important, because I had to learn from my mistakes, getting bumps in cases where I would stay unharmed if I had learned translology. Theoretical knowledge helps to become aware of translation methods, equivalence, character of various specific text-types, to be able to analyse cultural peculiarities of the source and target languages etc.'

'Pure' Translation Scholars Engaged Solely in Research:

As was stated at the beginning of the present article, in Latvia all academics are also engaged in pedagogical activities, i.e., in teaching translation theory or conducting practical classes. However, in the future, eventually they may retire from their academic posts and will continue only as researchers in the field of translation scholars.

Researchers in Different Fields of Scientific Inquiry dealing with Translation as a Phenomenon: Here is the opinion of a PhD in Computer Science, chairman and owner of one of the leading language technologies companies developing software for MT (machine translation) programmes and CAT (computer-aided translation) tools:

'Without any doubt, translation theory definitely helps translators in their work, it is like a foundation on which to build skills and specific forms of knowledge. People who have not studied translation theory often lack basic understanding how to tackle texts, that it is not as simple as "I take a text, read it and then just write it up in another language in the way how I understand it". One should understand that a text must be analysed, one should immerse oneself in it, should understand the message of this text, should understand terminology and context within the text has been developed etc. – all these things that can, hopefully, be taught in the process [translation] studies and being in academic milieu.'

CONCLUSIONS

From the panorama of opinions about the usefulness of translation theory (the term here is used as a 'synonym' for both the theoretical and applied translation studies), one gets an impression that this is a stunning multicoloured tapestry, a display of joyful, optimistic colours and patches of darker, pessimistic shades.

Thus, for example, almost two thirds (59%) of translator and interpreter training programme second-year students (predominantly around 19–20 years old), who are just in the process of getting to know what translation theory and applied translation studies are, are quite sure that they can translate without any theoretical knowledge, and only 2 per cent have an opposite opinion.

'Self-taught' translators and professional MA translator training programme students are much less categorical. They admit that theoretical knowledge enriches the palette of translation methods, enhances awareness of how to translate different text types, and how to fine-tune the corresponding target text terminology, etc.

The survey of MA students' answers to the question shows that at least one-fifth of them are absolutely convinced about the necessity to have knowledge of the basic translation studies' items; more than a half of them concede that professional translators could do without theory. However, their answers can be labelled as 'yes, but ...' – namely, translators 'cannot produce a high-quality translation without having some understanding of translation theory'.

As far as the opinions of the academic staff are concerned, they point out the positive influence of being knowledgeable in the basic aspects of theoretical and applied translation studies because this kind of knowledge saves time and effort, helps to develop meta-skills, helps to make choices among strategies.

In 1972, the author of the article, being a 4th year English language and literature specialisation university student, started to translate literary texts from English into. After his graduate and post-graduate studies, he initially conducted research in contrastive sociolinguistics. Later on, simultaneously with his academic activities at several European universities in Latvia, Moscow, and London (post-doctoral research in UCL *Survey of English Usage*) for the next 40 years, he combined non-literary (political, legal, business) translation and interpreting, and for the last 24 years reading lectures in translation studies, conducting simultaneous and consecutive BA and MA interpreting classes, as well as being a supervisor of several translational Doctoral dissertations.

Taking into consideration this experience, he has often thought about the need to connect theoretical and applied translation studies with translation and interpreting practice, sometimes having the feeling of sitting in an ivory tower playing something like Hesse's *Glassperlenspiel* (*The Glass Bead Game*) – being indulged in theorising for the sake of theorising. In the seventies, eighties, and the beginning of the nineties of the 20th century, when doing practical translating and interpreting before the start of his translational research, he did not care *about* theory. Gradually, he became one of those who do care *for* the discipline of translation studies.

The conclusions, the author has come to, are as follows: for professional translators, there is no particular need to 'theorise' while translating, i.e., there is no need to decide whether she/he is translating along the lines of Skopos theory, Polysystem theory or Manipulation school, but a better solution would be to use the practically applicable aspects of formal theories to gain optimal results. However, previous knowledge of translation theory (either during the informal process of self-education or in Bachelor or Master studies) would help to create shortcuts for more effective solutions of specific translation/interpreting problems.

From the survey of publications of translatoologists, it can be concluded that, so far, the central problem has been concerned with determining the place and the role that translation theory should have in professional translator and interpreter programmes. In future research, more attention should be focused on the opinions of formally untrained 'self-taught' translators and interpreters of literary texts.

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Jānis Silis (Dr. philol., Professor in Comparative and Contrastive Linguistics, Leading Researcher in Comparative and Contrastive Linguistics, Mg. Music in Choir Conducting). His research interests include translation studies, sociolinguistics, comparative and contrastive linguistics.
 ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1939-0761>.
 Email: janis.silis@venta.lv