

Review of Exploring Translation Theories  
**Anthony Pym, Exploring Translation Theories,  
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*Exploring Translation Theories* is written by Anthony Pym, a director of postgraduate programs in Translation and Intercultural Studies at Rovira i Virgili University in Tarragona, Spain. This book presents a comprehensive analysis of the paradigms of major western translation theories since 1960s, including equivalence, purposes, description, uncertainty, localization, and cultural translation. Instead of being a general overview of major western translation paradigms, the book is innovative and contributory in offering insights in the particular strengths and weakness of paradigms by actively engaging each of them with the other. Thus, the contesting of ideas will help to further explore the possibility of translation and develop the awareness of what translation can be. The book altogether consists of eight chapters.

In chapter 1, *'What is Translation Theory?'* (1-5), the questions concerning the differences and correlations between theorizing, theories and paradigms have been answered. Theorizing is seen as a departure point where theories come from, and when different theories develop names and explanations for multiple aspects of translation, paradigms come into being. The author further gives introductions to the chronological arrangement of the paradigms, the relations between those paradigms and the basic questions that all paradigms attempt to answer, concerning the conflict between uncertainty and equivalence.

In chapter 2, *'Natural Equivalence'* (6-22), the broad "equivalence paradigm" is divided into two sub-paradigms, which are "natural equivalence" and "directional equivalence". These two sub-paradigms both hold that "what we can say in one language can have the same value (the same worth or function) when it is translated into another language (Pym, 7)", but natural equivalence

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differs from directional equivalence in presuming the existence of equal value prior to the act of translation, which means “it should be the same whether translated from language A into language B or the other way around”. The procedures and modes of analysis of natural equivalence are further introduced. The author close this chapter by both admitting its validity in defending the very existence of the act of translation against the structural view of language and presenting some criticisms.

In Chapter 3, *'Directional Equivalence'* (25-38), the author points out that “directional equivalence is an asymmetric relation where the creation of an equivalent by translating one way does not imply that the same equivalence will also be created when translating the other way (Pym, 26)”, which implies that the decisions made by translators play a key role in the forming of translated texts. Since the translators constantly make decisions, the basic opposition concerning translating choices ensued such as free vs. literal, dynamic vs. formal translation, which is also the focal points of debates in Andrew Chesterman's theory of similarity, Nida's dynamic equivalence theory, Kade's typology of equivalence, and relevance theory. The author close this chapter by pointing out its virtues such as allowing translators more freedom, compatibility with skopos paradigm, as well as some skepticism against it, which include the presumed symmetry between languages, the superiority of source texts and unnecessary dichotomy.

In Chapter 4, *'Purposes'* (43-59), the author sees various theories belonging to this paradigm as based on a consensus that the priority should be given to the target-text purposes, and that it's not necessary that a translation is equivalent to its source text. Different purposes require translators to be provided with information by participants in the professional chains. The various theories in this paradigm hold different views of the roles translators are expected to play. Translator is seen as the decider of target text purposes by Vermeer, an expert in cross-cultural communication by Holz-Manttan. For Gouadec, translator should work in teams, and translator' decisions are determined by the complete information from the client in the pre-translation phase. At the end of this chapter, the author presents some criticisms against this paradigm, such as its inability to resolve cases of conflict purposes, not being cost-effective, contradicting ethics of truth and accuracy, etc.

In chapter 5, *'Descriptions'* (64-85), the author points out that “descriptive approaches describe what translations actually are, rather than just prescribe how they should be (Pym, 64)”. The key concepts in this paradigm include

translation shifts, systems, assumed translations, norms, universals and assumed laws of translation. Two approaches towards the description of translation shifts are “bottom-up” analysis and “top-down” analysis, the translation theorists who are quite successful in apply top-down models include Anton Popovic and James Holms. Top-down models try to situate these shifts in different historical situations and seek their causal factors. With the attention given to “what translations are usually like” in particular historical context, the norms, possible laws and universals of translation can be analyzed and theorized. While admitting the contributions made by the descriptive paradigm, such as the revelation of historical variety and validity, the author presents some criticisms, which include its lack of attention to people and practical help for translators.

The basic assumption of chapter 6, *'Uncertainty'* (90-113), is that “translators cannot be absolutely certain about the meanings they translate (Pym, 90)”. Uncertainty paradigm can further be divided into two sub-paradigms, one concerning the uncertainty about translations and the other concerning general uncertainty about all meanings. Several theories are introduced as ways of solving the problem of translation under the condition of uncertainty, such as theories of illumination developed by Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, and Ernest-August Gutt, theories of consensus by John Locke, Jerrold Katz and Quine, Hermeneutics by Heidegger, Antonie Berman, Constructivism by Donald Kiraly, Game theory by Jiri Levy, and theories of semiosis. Deconstruction is introduced as a further move to revealing uncertainty rather hiding it. The general criticism of the paradigm of uncertainty is its lack of rigor and actual help for translators.

Chapter 7 is *'Localization'* (120-138). Localization is seen as a response to the paradigm of uncertainty by creating artificial language and cultures (Pym, 120). Localization, as a paradigm, is new in the use of translation technologies and one-to-many patterns of translation, with the effect of introducing non-linear modes of text production and reception. The use of new technologies such as management systems, extensive controlled languages and translation memories will generate fixed glossaries and decontextualized translation. This is why localization can also be seen as a partial return to equivalence. Localization is often criticized for belittling translators, generating low-quality texts and reducing cultural diversities.

In chapter 8, *'Cultural translations'* (143-159), the author points out that the primary focus of this paradigm is cultural processes rather than products. “Translation is seen as a general activity of communication between cultural

groups". The early works on this cultural process include Bhaba's non-substantive translation, Jacobson's semiosis, Even-Zohar's transfer theory and Pym's theory of movements, and these can be seen as developed from social anthropology. Other theories in this paradigm draw on translation sociology, German work on communication between different cultural group and psychoanalysis the representative figures in this field include Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and Spyvak. This paradigm revolutionized the traditional concepts of translation and separate languages and cultures can no longer be assumed; however it is generally criticized for weak interdisciplinarity and lack of direct implications for translation professions.

This book is contributory to translation studies as a whole in the following aspects.

Firstly, it offers a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weakness of each paradigm by enacting confrontations between ideas instead of presupposing any of them to be the "right" or "wrong". During this process, the relations between different paradigms are also explored. This book considers different paradigms as a response to the fundamental conflict between uncertainty and equivalence; therefore, different from traditional views of dismissing equivalence paradigm as naïve, it treats equivalence paradigm as the fundamental paradigm by which all other paradigms can be defined, and presents natural equivalence and directional equivalence as its two sub-paradigms. Equivalence with its complexity and longevity is valued as a necessary social illusion that defends the very existence of translation practice, yet it is becoming more refined and exact in the process of constantly being contested and accommodated by other paradigms. The skopos theory admit the existence of equivalence in "special case" scenario, and the localization paradigm largely incorporate the ideas of equivalence, whereas, uncertainty paradigm can be seen as a fight against equivalence theory by classifying skopos and equivalence as essentialisms.

Secondly, this book extends the scope of translation studies by establishing cultural translation as a new paradigm. The paradigm of cultural translation in this book is used in a metaphorical way to indicate the general activity of communication between cultural groups, which is much wider than that defined by Jeremy Munday. The theories in this paradigm incorporate the developments in social anthropology, translation sociology and psychoanalysis, the interdisciplinary nature of which indicates the trend of nowadays translation studies, and it is helpful both in terms of translation professions and relevant

fields such as post-modern sociology and postcolonialism, etc.

Thirdly, the book is stimulating for readers to do their own researches. At the end of each chapter, the author presents the frequently hold arguments of each paradigm without giving judgments. These questions can be further topics for independent researches.

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