Polysystem theory

Its prospect as a framework for translation research*

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This article deals with three interrelated issues: first the 'cultural turn' of Itamar Even-Zohar in contrast to the 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies, then the application of an augmented version of Polysystem theory in a short case study, and finally the question of objectivity and neutrality in descriptive polysystem studies. It is argued that Polysystem theory and other cultural theories of translation, be they descriptive or politically committed, can be mutually enriching rather than incompatible, and that, with some augmentation and further development, it may serve as an adequate framework for research into the 'external politics' of translation.

Keywords: polysystem, polysystem theory, norm, translation studies, cultural turn, ideology, politics, descriptivism

1. Two 'cultural turns'

Developed in the 1970s, Itamar Even-Zohar's Polysystem hypothesis was originally designed as a theoretical framework for the descriptive study of literature and language in their cultural context. His theory has made a great impact on the discipline of Translation Studies, and a 'school' is said to have been formed under its influence. The attraction of his theory to some translation scholars presumably lies in the prospect that, as Even-Zohar states (1979:300), "the complicated questions of how literature correlates with language, society, economy, politics, ideology, etc., may here, with the PS theory, merit less simplistic and reductionist hypotheses than otherwise". Facilitated by Polysystem theory, these scholars have taken a 'cultural turn' (Hermans 1999:110),

Target 13:2 (2001), **317–332.**
ISSN 0924–1884/E-ISSN 1569-9986

focusing their attention on the 'external politics' of translation. Paradoxically, it is also a movement away from Polysystem theory on the part of a number of scholars, mainly because they find the theory inadequate as "a comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework that can encompass the social and ideological embedding and impact of translation" (Hermans 1996: 41).

Theo Hermans (1996, 1999) has made some initial attempts to develop such a framework by extending Gideon Toury's concept of norms. However, it appears from a recent discussion (in Schäffner 1998) that "the norms governing translation in their totality (that is, the overall 'normative model' a translation event is subject to)" (Toury 1998: 23) are still a fuzzy notion. While Toury (1998: 23) states that the value of these norms "is likely to be different due to its different systemic position", Hermans mentions three normative levels:

> general cultural and ideological norms which may be held to apply throughout the larger part of a community; translational norms arising from general concepts of translatability and cross-lingual representation alive in that community; and the textual and other appropriateness norms which prevail in the particular client system for which individual translations cater. (1998: 60)

But what are the respective values and systemic positions of these norms and their interrelations? And how do they work together or compete with one another to form the resultant overall 'normative model'? — These questions still remain unanswered.

Even-Zohar also started to take a 'cultural turn' in the 1990s, in the sense that he shifted his research interest from language and literature to culture in general. This is most clearly seen in two of his recent articles. First, in his 1997 version of "Polysystem theory" (Even-Zohar 1997a) he has turned the theory explicitly into a theory of culture by deleting specific references to language, literature and translation. Secondly, and most importantly, in "Factors and dependencies in culture: A revised outline for Polysystem culture research" he presents a scheme "for the constitutive factors involved with any socio-semiotic (cultural) event" (1997b: 19):

This scheme, when it first appeared in "The 'literary system'" in 1990, was designed to account for "the *macro*-factors involved with the function of the literary system" only (1990: 32).

The motivations behind the two cultural turns are quite different. While the translation scholars who have taken such a turn wish to focus on the 'external politics' of translation, Even-Zohar does so in the belief that

> System, or better: relational, thinking has provided the sciences of man with versatile tools to economize in the analysis of socio-semiotic phenomena. This approach has allowed the significant reduction of the number of parameters assumed to work in any given context, thus making it possible to get rid of huge nomenclatures and intricate classifications. Instead, a relatively small set of *relations* could be hypothesized to explain a large and complex array of *phenomena*. (1997b: 15)

Therefore, he has got rid of the classification of polysystems into categories such as politics, ideology, economics, literature and language, in order to foreground the universal features of all polysystems and formulate a general theory of culture. In fact, the very word 'polysystem' is not used at all in the second part of the article, where the revised scheme is presented. Moreover, he has reduced the number of factors involved to only three: institution, repertoire and market, besides the direct participants of the event (producer and consumer) and the product itself.

This scheme certainly has the virtue of economy, and may provide a general orientation for polysystem culture research. But when it is used as a framework for research into any particular polysystem, it may need to be revised and elaborated in light of the special features of the polysystem to be investigated.[1]

Take for example the factor of 'repertoire', which "designates the aggregate of rules and materials which govern both the *making* and *handling*, or production and consumption, of any given product" (Even-Zohar 1997b: 20). If the object of study is a translated literary text, then the materials are provided mainly by the linguistic and literary polysystems, such as lexical items and rhetorical devices, but the rules that determine the usability of these materials may come from a large variety of sources — political, ideological, economic, technological, literary, linguistic, etc. These rules may be in a variety of relations to one another — some may be overlapping or mutually reinforcing; others may be competing or hierarchical (cf. Hermans 1996: 39–40). The empirical researcher may wish to differentiate between these rules of different sources and levels and explore their inter-relations instead of grouping all of them under a blanket term.

Who makes and governs these rules? It is "the institution in correlation with the market", according to Even-Zohar (1997b: 21). But are they the only factors? The rules, or norms, for text production, for example, may change

with advances in technology or the emergence of new forms of art. It is not sure whether all such changes can be related to the institution or the market through some tortuous path. Even if they can, the researcher may still appreciate a more detailed checklist (cf. Schäffner 1998: 40) in order not to overlook some 'minor' factors.

All polysystems share certain common features, of course, but each of them has unique features too, in terms of both intra- and inter-relations. Some may be more autonomous, others more heteronomous, and they may interact with different polysystems in different ways. Therefore, a special checklist may need to be devised for each case study according to the nature of a given polysystem.

Another problem that researchers of the external politics of translation may find in Even-Zohar's Polysystem theory is that it regards culture, society, etc., as "sign-governed human patterns of communication" (Even-Zohar 1990: 9). In my opinion, it is this semiotic origin of his theory that has determined its "emphasis on models and repertoires" rather than on "actual political and social power relations or more concrete entities such as institutions or groups" (Hermans 1999: 118). The justification for a semiotic approach to the study of culture is that culture, or even reality, is manifested in signs. This is beyond dispute, but signs are just the surface manifestations of reality, and so the question is whether the study of signs should or can lead to a knowledge of reality itself, that is, what is concealed behind the signs, what is really at stake from a socio-cultural point of view. Just as linguistics, even socio-linguistics, is not able to go all the way towards the discovery of socio-cultural factors of translation (Venuti 2000: 109–110), socio-semiotics cannot but fall short of the purpose of translation scholars who are interested in the 'real thing', who see society, culture, translation, etc., as power-governed human patterns of organizations or activities.

2. An augmented version of Polysystem theory in action

In the belief that the cultural turn in Translation Studies need not have been accompanied by a movement away from Polysystem theory as the latter has laid the theoretical groundwork for the investigation of the 'external politics' of translation, I have ventured in another article (Chang 2000) to offer an augmented version of Polysystem theory, which I tentatively call a 'Macro-polysystem hypothesis'. It goes in a direction opposite to that of Even-Zohar's

revised outline in the sense that there is an increase rather than a decrease in the intricacy of classifications.

It cannot be overemphasized that this version is not mutually exclusive with Even-Zohar's revised outline. It is meant to complement the latter, designed specially to provide a checklist for the study of translation in its cultural context.

'Macro-polysystem' refers to what Even-Zohar calls "the overall polysystem of culture" (1990:93). I propose that the activities and products of translators, especially those of literary texts, are governed mainly, but not exclusively, by norms originating from six polysystems or certain sub-systems thereof:

1. The political polysystem, which is made up of institutions of power and marginalized groups;
2. The ideological polysystem, which consists of competing and conflicting ideologies of all sorts that exist in a given culture, sponsored by different groups;
3. The economic polysystem, whose norms would bind translation activities to certain 'economic principles';
4. The linguistic polysystem, which would require conformity to the norms of a language variety;
5. The literary polysystem, which offers certain "recognized" literary models (see Toury 1995:171) for translations to emulate; and
6. The translational polysystem, whose norms may be partially reflected in certain classroom exercises where the texts to be translated are not posited to serve any real purpose, and students are instructed just to translate, as if in a cultural vacuum.

It can be seen that norms originating from the translational polysystem often conflict with the other types of norms. These different types of norms pull the translator in different directions, and reach an equilibrium with the resistance of the translator, if any. This equilibrium becomes "the overall 'normative model' a translation event is subject to".

These norms of different origins are of course highly hypothetical constructs. When they manifest themselves, they are already affected by considerations of other polysystems.

In the following paragraphs I would like to dwell briefly on a Chinese version of David Lodge's *Small world* published in the People's Republic of China to illustrate the application of this augmented Polysystem hypothesis.

In choosing this work for translation, the producers are embracing an ideology that is offensive to the central system in China's ideological polysystem

mainly because of the descriptions of sex in the work. The publisher is certainly aware of the ideological problems involved: a synopsis on a flyleaf asserts that "readers with a little bit of culture will be able to see its true value and meaning" instead of "mistaking" it for a pornographic work.[2] Economic considerations may also have played a part, because 7,000 copies were printed in the second edition of 1996, only four years after 10,500 copies had been printed in the first, and therefore a modest profit must have been made.[3]

What is most interesting is the following paragraph in the "Publisher's Notes" attached at the end of the book:

> The work contains a lot of arguments about academic theory and literary criticism, and some descriptions of sex. These descriptions of sex cannot be deleted because their use is inseparable from the author's exposition of his views on literary theory.

In spite of this statement, one can find that although some descriptions of sex do remain, over twenty passages at least have been deleted or diluted (32, 59, 88, 89, 98, 105, 106, 107, 111, 154, 158, 181–182, 190, 256, 364, 366). Some of these passages are about literary theory, such as the following one, which is from Professor Morris Zapp's conference paper "Textuality as striptease":

> When we have seen the girl's underwear we want to see her body, when we have seen her breasts we want to see her buttocks, and when we have seen her buttocks we want to see her pubis, and when we see her pubis, the dance ends — but is our curiosity and desire satisfied? Of course not. *The vagina remains hidden within the girl's body, shaded by her pubic hair, and even if she were to spread her legs before us …* it would still not satisfy the curiosity and desire set in motion by the stripping. (Lodge 1985: 26–27. Emphasis added.)

The translation is done quite faithfully until it reaches the italic part, which is summarized as:

> Danshi, jishi rang women zai wang geng yinmi chu kan (32)
> [However, even if we were allowed to look at the more hidden place]

Deletions are occasionally marked by ellipsis dots (e.g., 107, 190) or by notes in brackets such as "some slight deletions here and below" (181), but most of the time there is no indication of any kind.

A few 'mistranslations' appear to have been intentional. For example, the following two questions that Fulvia Morgana asks Morris Zapp are turned into something so completely different that they must have been the result of a conscious strategy:

"Is it really twenty-five centimetres?" (134)
"Ni de xingyu zhende feichang qiang ma?" (154)
[Is your sexual desire really very strong?]

"Didn't you make your wife measure it with her tape measure?" (135)
"Ni meiyou baonüe guo ni de qizi ma?" (154)
["Have you never violated your wife?"]

In China, explicit descriptions of sex in translations and original works are likely to incur severe punishment after publication, and therefore the producers cannot go too far even if they wish to challenge the dominant ideology. Then why does the publisher claim that no deletions have been made? An informed person who asked to be kept anonymous told me that "it is more or less an 'art' an advertising art [*sic*]", and that "they want to attract more readers for the obvious reason". In other words, the "Publisher's Notes" reflect the rising power of the economic norms of profit-making since the mid-1980s and the declining influence of ethical norms in the commercial, professional, governmental and interpersonal spheres, which are determined by the new ideology that "to get rich is glorious".

Who has been responsible for the expurgations and alterations? According to my informant, it is mainly the editor. It is common knowledge in China that editors usually assume the duty of revising translated texts, sometimes without checking the source text, and sometimes without the prior consent or even knowledge of the translator, depending on the power relations between the two parties. A translator in China told me: "I myself am always sorry and angry when I know some of the passages and sentences are deleted or distorted. I can do nothing about it but complaining [*sic*]". This is to say that the editor, acting on behalf of the central systems, sees to it that dominant norms are observed or at least not seriously violated, and the translator usually assumes a peripheral position in the power structure where the business of publishing is concerned, even if the translator enjoys a higher academic and social status than the editor.

Even unintentional translation errors may sometimes reflect the influence of ideological norms. For example, the double meaning in the passage "[a]nother, smaller advertisement urging the passer-by to "'*Have a Fling with Faggots Tonight*' is not … a manifesto issued by Rummidge Gay Liberation" (97; original emphasis) is lost on the translator. A footnote in the translation says that 'fling' is a lively and unconstrained dance of the Scottish Highlands, and "Gay Liberation" is translated as "zongqing huanle" (giving up to pleasure) (109–110). The incomprehension must have been due to the fact that gay rights

are unimaginable to a person brought up in a culture where homosexuality is a taboo. In macro-polysystemic terms, this particular translation of "Gay Liberation" is caused by a general oblivion of a homosexual system in the gender polysystem, which is again determined by the dominant ideology.

When no ideological considerations are involved, the translator tends to adhere to the words and sentence structures of the source text, resulting in a translation that is often grammatical but not idiomatic, as can be seen in the following passage:

> "Will you marry me, Angelica?"
>
> "Of course not!" she exclaimed, snatching her hand away and laughing incredulously.
>
> "Why not?"
>
> "Well, for a hundred reasons. I've only just met you, and I don't want to get married anyway."
>
> "Never?"
>
> "I don't say never, but first I want a career of my own, and that means I must be free to go anywhere." (39)

> "Ni yuanyi jia gei wo ma? Anjilika?"
>
> "Dangran bu!" Ta mengdi chouchu ziji de shou jiaodao, bing yihuo di dui ta xiao zhe.
>
> "Wei shenme bu?"
>
> "N, you yibai ge liyou. Wo zhi shi ganggang yu dao ni; zaishuo, wo genben bu xiang jiehun."
>
> "Yongyuan bu?"
>
> "Wo meiyou shuo yongyuan bu, dan shouxian wo yao you ziji de shiye, zhe yiwei zhe wo bixu you qu renhe difang de ziyou." (48)

> ["Will you marry me? Angelica?"
>
> "Of course not!" she snatched her hand away exclaiming, and laughing/smiling to him in a puzzled way.
>
> "Why not?"
>
> "Well, there are a hundred reasons. I've only just met you; moreover, I don't want to get married at all."
>
> "Never?"
>
> "I haven't said never, but first I want to have my own career, and that means I must have the freedom to go anywhere."]

Two strategies adopted for the Chinese translation can be noted. The first is the infrequent use of the sentence-end modal particle, which occurs only once, namely, "ma" in the translation of "Will you marry me". The modal particle in this case is grammatically obligatory because without it the sentence would have

become a statement or a rhetorical question (i.e. "You will marry me") rather than a simple question. The modal particle is not used in other places (such as in the translation of "Of course not!", "Why not?", "for a hundred reasons" and "Never?") where it is grammatically optional but its occurrence would have made the sentences sound like natural speech. This strategy can be explained by the fact that in Standard English, and hence in the source text, there is not any sentence-end modal particle. The second strategy is the literal translation of the minor sentences "Of course not!", "Why not?", and "Never?". It results in ellipses that are unnatural in Chinese, especially in spoken Chinese.[4] These two strategies indicate that the translator is striving for a similarity in linguistic form rather than in idiomaticity, and the effect is that the dialogue, while close to the meaning of the source text, sounds artificial, reminding readers that this is a translation since artificiality in dialogue is a feature rather common in contemporary Chinese translations of Western novels. In Toury's terms, this Chinese version of *Small world* is a "linguistically-motivated" rather than a "literary" translation (see Toury 1995: 171). In macro-polysystemic terms, translational polysystem norms have carried more weight than literary polysystem norms provided that linguistic polysystem norms are not violated.

The general trend of translational norms in China in the past two decades seems to lean towards the adequacy pole more than the acceptability pole.[5] According to Even-Zohar, this happens when translated literature occupies a central position in the literary polysystem (1990: 50–51), but this does not seem to be the case in China. Translated literature seems to have moved towards the periphery in the literary polysystem since the mid-1980s, while the literary polysystem itself has started the same centrifugal movement in the cultural macro-polysystem (Chang 1997: 49–57), but there seems to be little evidence of a corresponding shift in translational norms towards acceptability. A probable explanation is that translational norms in China are determined not only by the polysystemic position of translated literature, but also by the dominant ideological norms that have laid special emphasis on loyalty as a moral principle, and by the patriarchal socio-political structure (Chang 1998: 37–38).

The ideological manipulation in the Chinese version of *Small world* has been effected at a time when mainstream norm-setters, that is, local translation theorists, generally believe that "under normal circumstances the translator … has no right to make omissions or alterations in the translation process" (Wang 2000: 25). But apparently this norm applies only to translators, not to editors. The problem — or the beauty of it, depending on one's institutional position — is that faithfulness is also the expectancy norm of the reader, who is not always able to identify

such manipulation. Chinese readers of *Small world* are told that Perrse and Lily make love once (366), and it is impossible for most of them to know that the original Perrse and Lily have done so four times (324–325). The dominant ideology in China is having the cake and eating it: it maintains the illusion of faithfulness and at the same time manipulates both the text and the reader. As Susan Bassnett observes:

> Translation, of course, is a primary method of imposing meaning while concealing the power relations that lie behind the production of that meaning. If we take censorship as an example, then it is easy to see how translation can impose censorship while simultaneously purporting to be a free and open rendering of the source text. (1998:136)

The norms that pull the translator of *Small world* in different directions may thus be traced to the following systems:

1. A peripheral ideology that accepts descriptions of sex in literary works;
2. A central ideology that disapproves of, or even forbids, explicit descriptions of sex in literary works, overruling the central translational polysystem norm of faithfulness;
3. A central ideology that ignores the existence of a homosexual system in the gender polysystem;
4. A central political system that gives the editor power over the translator;
5. A central political system that desires to manipulate the people effectively by not allowing them to know that they are being manipulated;
6. A central ideology that champions the moral principle that "to get rich is glorious", overruling another moral principle of honesty and reinforcing the economic polysystem norm of profit making;
7. A central linguistic system that imposes its grammar on prose; and
8. A central ideology and a dominant patriarchal socio-political structure that prioritize loyalty as a moral principle, reinforcing the central translational polysystem norm of faithfulness in matters of a non-ideological nature, at the expense of literary polysystem norms, regardless of the position of translated literature in the literary polysystem.

The first four factors have led to the partial bowdlerization of the translated text, factors 5 and 6 have resulted in the attempt to conceal the bowdlerization, and the general translation orientation of adequacy rather than acceptability is determined by the last two factors.

Though brief and crude, this case study serves to illustrate the possibilities and limitations of this augmented version of Polysystem theory. It has the

potential of a framework for research that attempts to reconstruct and resolve the overall 'normative model' operative in the translation process, and trace each constituent part to its polysystemic source, thus revealing the power relations that are concealed and various kinds of values that are too often taken for granted. However, it is not comprehensive and intricate enough yet. Relations between the source and target cultures have not been taken into consideration. The nomenclature may still be regarded as small. That is to say, one may still find the terms too few, and some of them too broad, especially 'ideology', which has been used to mean so many different things. These limitations may become more serious in more in-depth and larger-scale studies. After all, this so-called 'Macro-polysystem hypothesis' is just another "faltering step" after Hermans' (1996). Further refinement and augmentation may be necessary.

3. The question of objectivity and neutrality

Investigations conducted in this framework, however in-depth and large in scale, and whatever their goals, will remain speculative and biased, and can hardly hope for a very high degree of objectivity and exhaustiveness. So they may be considered unscientific and unacademic by those who believe in the possibility of attaining objectivity and neutrality in Descriptive Translation Studies. However, serious doubts have been cast on the possibility of absolute detachment and objectivity or of pure description in the human sciences. The problem has three dimensions. One is that, as Venuti remarks, the very act of engaging oneself in Translation Studies signifies opposition to its marginal position (1995:312–313), and the argument for a particular approach constitutes an attempt to "control the behaviour of translation scholars" (1998:28). That is to say, the description of the struggle in a certain polysystem — that of translation in our case — is involved in the struggle in another polysystem — that of academia. There is of course no escape from this dilemma. The only thing the descriptive translation scholar can do is to leave it to someone else to be descriptive about the struggle in the academic polysystem.

Another dimension is that description, even if it can be (more or less) detached, objective or neutral, alters the perception or the status of the things described (cf. Hermans 1999:150). It may expose certain aspects of a system that the system wishes to hide (such as the censorship reported above in the case study), playing the role of the *enfant terrible*. While traditional, pro-establishment

approaches take central systems such as canonized literature, standard language and orthodox ideology as the only legitimate objects of academic research in order to protect their interests, the descriptive Polysystem approach regards the integration into research of objects previously unnoticed or bluntly rejected as a precondition for an adequate understanding of any polysystem (see Even-Zohar 1990: 13). This means that it refuses to take for granted the assumed inherent superiority of central systems, and sees the standards they uphold as norms rather than as the only truth, thus demythicizing its very centrality. The mere recognition of the existence of a neglected peripheral system (such as a set of translation strategies that will produce what are called 'bad translations' or 'non-translations' by mainstream critics) may draw attention to it and contribute to its legitimation, whereas acknowledging the dominant position of central norms may be construed as endorsement. In other words, the act of 'detached' description of the struggle between rival systems may be involuntarily involved in that struggle.

The third dimension is that absolute objectivity in observation is impossible, as Venuti (1998: 28–29) and Hermans (1999: 36, 146–150) point out, because one always observes from a cultural/historical context or a polysystemic position. The deeper one probes below the surface of signs, the truer this remark becomes. As norms are not directly observable (Hermans 1996: 39), their reconstruction already involves an element of speculation, not to speak of the further attempt to resolve them and trace them to various systems — systems that "exist only in system theory" rather than in reality (Hermans 1999: 103).

In spite of these limitations, one need not be deterred from trying to discover, or speculate on, the underlying causes of translational or other cultural phenomena if one finds it worthwhile to do so (cf. Hermans 1999: 118). One can still try to be as objective and descriptive as possible vis-à-vis one's object of study if one considers objectivity and descriptivism one's ideals while bearing in mind that these ideals are not entirely achievable.

On the other hand, one need not reject the Polysystem concept even if one does not believe in descriptivism, because there is no necessary relation between the Polysystem concept and descriptivism. It is only accidental, at least for some theorists, that the two happen to go together (see Hermans 1999: 41).

4. Concluding remarks: Where shall we go from here?

While various cultural theories such as poststructuralism, postcolonialism and feminism have caused radical changes in literary and cultural studies (Venuti 1997: 363) and are "currently making most of the running in translation studies" (Hermans 1999: 157), Polysystem theory has had hardly any dialogue with these theories, except the small-scale discussion recorded in *Translation and norms* (Schäffner 1998).

Polysystem theory, once an avant-garde paradigm, now appears to be going out of fashion in certain circles. While this trend is in part due to some misunderstanding of the theory by a number of scholars, the theory itself seems to be in need of further development. First, it needs to be "more self-reflexive and self-critical, aware of its own historicity and institutional position, of its presuppositions and blind spots, of the pitfalls of representation by means of language and translation" (Hermans 1999: 149–150). That is to say, it needs to be widened to include itself as a component of the cultural macro-polysystem, as an integral part of its object of study. The last section of this article illustrates how, inspired by other cultural theories, Polysystem theory may explain its limitations in its own terms.

Secondly, if we make it our task to trace norms to their source polysystems — politics, ideology, gender, etc. — we need input from theories focusing on these individual Polysystems. Without the advances made in gender studies, for example, polysystem scholars may not have been aware of the fact that certain translation strategies are governed by certain gender norms.

The deplorable absence of dialogue between Polysystem theorists and other cultural theorists seems to have been caused by an unnecessary foregrounding of the differences between them. It is true that while the former are often proud of their descriptivistic stance towards the object of their study, most of the latter profess to be morally/politically committed. However, there is more common ground between the Polysystem approach and committed approaches than has been recognized. Both take a cultural perspective in that they see translation as a cultural phenomenon more than a purely linguistic one, and that they put emphasis on the 'external politics' of translation, exploring the relation between translation and socio-cultural factors such as ideology, power, economics, etc.[6] Their descriptions and explanations may be different, but their projects will both have the effect of upsetting the existing power relations. While Polysystem theory "involves a rejection of value judgments as criteria for an *a priori* selection of the objects of study" (Even-Zohar 1990: 13), in disregard of the

interests of central systems, the committed approaches tend to bring the study of peripheral systems into the limelight (cf. Hermans 1999: 155).

Moreover, there is no necessary relation between the Polysystem concept and descriptivism as mentioned above. This means that the Polysystem concept and the committed approaches are not inherently incompatible. On the contrary, they may be complementary. Polysystem theory can be widened and enriched by other cultural theories, and may in turn provide a more comprehensive and substantial framework for the study of translation, enabling all researchers, whether they are politically/morally detached or committed, to take a step back and enjoy a panoramic view.

For this reason constructive dialogue between the two kinds of approaches is urgently needed in the interest of all parties concerned.

Notes

* This research has benefited from financial and logistical support from the Research Committee and Arts Programme of Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

1. In fact, the problem for empirical researchers that Hermans finds in the old version of Polysystem theory may have become even more serious, that is, "[i]ts terms are too apodictic, too few, and therefore much too broad to be able to guide research in any meaningful way beyond a general orientation towards the social context of literature" (Hermans 1994: 140) — or that of any other cultural event.

2. All translations and back-translations from Chinese are mine, unless indicated otherwise. Discussion is based on the second edition of 1996.

3. In 1998 a new version of *Small world* was put out by another publisher in a five-volume series under the title of "Works of David Lodge".

4. The three minor sentences could be rendered into more idiomatic Chinese as "Dangran bu yuanyi la!" (Of course not willing la!), "Wei shenme bu yuanyi ne?" (Why not willing ne?), and "Yongyuan bu jiehun ma?" (Never marry ma?) respectively ('la', 'ne' and 'ma' are transliterations of Chinese modal particles).

5. Adequacy means "[subscription] to the norms of the source text, and through them also to the norms of the source language and culture" (Toury 1995: 56), as opposed to "acceptability", which is determined by "subscription to norms originating in the target culture" (Toury 1995: 57).

6. This is why Susan Bassnett finds a "curious mixture of formalist and Marxist methods" in the Polysystem approach, which she regards as its "beauty" (1998: 106).

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Résumé

Cet article présente trois sujets corrélés: le "tournant culturel" d'Itamar Even-Zohar par opposition au "tournant culturel" des études de la traduction; l'application d'une version élargie de la théorie du polysystème au cours d'une brève étude de cas; l'objectivité et la neutralité des études descriptives de type polysystémique. L'auteur soutient que la théorie du polysystème ainsi que d'autres théories culturelles de la traduction, qu'elles soient descriptives ou impliquées sur le plan politique, peuvent s'enrichir mutuellement plutôt qu'apparaître comme incompatibles. Grâce à des extensions et à des développements, la théorie du polysystème peut même produire un cadre adéquat pour l'étude de la "politique externe" de la traduction.

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