

Compte rendu

Mona Baker (ed.): *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*.
London/New York: Routledge, 1998. xix + 654 pp.

In the general editor's preface to their Translation Studies series, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere have proclaimed in the opening paragraph: "The growth of Translation Studies as a separate discipline is a success story of the 1980s" (Lefevere 1992: xi). This proclamation is very much shared by Mary Snell-Hornby and others who have made a similar observation. As they see it, since the mid-1980s, Translation Studies "has gained recognition as an independent discipline in its own right" (Snell-Hornby 1992: ix). No doubt, such statements or observations sound very pleasing and encouraging, especially to those who are primarily concerned about theoretical issues about translation, because they have now finally found their own identity and do not have to 'live under somebody else's roof' anymore. In other words, translation studies is now Translation Studies and should no longer be considered a subdivision or sub-branch of other disciplines such as Comparative Literature or Applied Linguistics. However, to make such statements or observations is not very difficult, but to see that Translation Studies has really become a fully developed and mature discipline, or interdiscipline, as Snell-Hornby and others would call it, is by no means an easy task. For example, as a separate discipline, what is it that makes it 'separate'? To where do its boundaries extend or what does its territory ideally encompass? What subjects *must* be covered and what *may* be covered? What are the core issues of the discipline and what are peripheral? What relations or connections does it have with other disciplines? What kind of methodology can be applied? What type of terminology should be developed? and so on, and so forth. These are fundamental questions that must be answered in order for Translation Studies to firmly establish itself as a solid academic discipline.

The recent publication of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (referred to hereafter as, the *Encyclopedia*), can undoubtedly be seen as a major addition to the rapidly increasing literature on the subject that helps, in a significant way, to answer these fundamental questions.

A crystallization of the efforts of over ninety translation scholars from more than

thirty countries over a period of some six years since 1991, this voluminous *Encyclopedia* has indeed offered “a comprehensive overview of translation studies as an academic discipline” (flap of front cover). The eighty-one entries in Part I of the book deal with general topics both on translation as a profession and on Translation Studies as an independent discipline, and the remaining thirty-one entries in Part II cover the national histories of translation in such major linguistic and cultural communities as: China, Japan, Russia, France, Germany, Spain, Britain, the USA, Latin America and Africa.

One of the most outstanding features of the book is its comprehensiveness, although, in the modest words of the editor, “a pioneering work of reference which sets out to chart a territory that has hitherto not been charted, to capture the core concerns of a discipline in a state of flux, cannot hope to be totally comprehensive” (Baker 1998: xiii). A careful look at the contents of the work shows that it certainly has achieved a very good degree of comprehensiveness, and to some extent it can be regarded as *the* most comprehensive encyclopedia that has come out so far in the discipline. In part I, a sufficient number of the major topics are covered on, and about translation, that might interest the translation theorist and practitioner alike. Though the various topics are arranged alphabetically in the book, I have roughly categorized them here under the following twelve broad themes, for analysis: namely, general theoretical issues (11 entries); research approaches to translation (9 entries); basic concepts of translation (10 entries); typology of translation (15 entries); strategies/methods of translation (10 entries); translation terminology (4 entries); metaphors in translation (3 entries); history of translation (2 entries); translation criticism (2 entries); translation teaching (2 entries); translation organizations (3 entries); and Translation Studies and related disciplines (10 entries). This categorization of topics into thematic groups is necessarily crude and subjective, and may be a far cry from what the editor of the volume had in mind when planning the project. However, since the topics have not been thematically arranged by the editor, my categorization might serve as a useful index as to what kind of “comprehensive overview of translation studies as an academic discipline” has actually been offered by Mona Baker and her team. From the distribution of topics as described above, it is not difficult to agree that the picture the *Encyclopedia* has presented is relatively complete, and the relative weight of the topics covered is well balanced with ‘general theoretical issues’

taking up 13.5% of the overall contribution in Part I of the volume; ‘research approaches to translation’ 11%; ‘basic concepts of translation’ 12.5%; ‘typology of translation’ 18.5%; ‘strategies/methods of translation’ 12.5%; ‘terminology of translation’ 5%; ‘metaphorics in translation’ 3.5%; ‘history of translation’ 2.5%; ‘translation criticism’ 2.5%; ‘translation teaching’ 2.5%; ‘translation organizations’ 3.5% and ‘Translation Studies and related disciplines’ 12.5%. In a way, this type of mapping can be regarded as having answered, at least partly, some of the questions raised earlier, namely, how the territory of Translation Studies is best mapped, what issues are core issues and what issues are peripheral, and what relations or connections Translations Studies maintains with other disciplines.

Comprehensiveness is also a striking feature of Part II, the history and traditions of translation. Unlike the two entries on the history of translation in Part I, one of which is a kind of conceptual discussion of how the history of translation in general should be approached (*Encyclopedia*: 100-6) and the other a discussion of machine translation in particular (*Encyclopedia*: 140-3), what is offered in Part II are the national histories of translation and interpreting in some thirty language-cultural settings. As far as I am aware of, the *Encyclopedia* is the first ever published attempt to include in its historical section as many traditions of translation as possible, covering both East and West. So much so, that it may perhaps be regarded as offering a world history of translation, thus providing a useful basis for the development of a ‘comparative science of translation’ including a ‘comparative history of translation’, a sub-discipline of Translation Studies that I have proposed in a recent paper (Tan 1997). Inevitably, for a relatively short historical section, not all traditions could have been represented; nor has it been possible for those represented to be detailed. However, those thirty-odd entries, albeit very restricted and brief, are sufficient enough to offer “a glimpse of what a full-scale history of each tradition might have to offer” (Baker 1998: xiv). And since the thirty-odd translation histories have covered many of the major traditions in the world, Latin, Chinese, Russian, English, German, French, Indian, Japanese, Arabic, Hebrew, and so on, it certainly deserves being regarded as the first of its kind in providing a ‘comprehensive’ overview of the history of translation in the world.

A second major feature of the book is that it is up-to-date. Though the work started some six years ago, the entries are nonetheless quite up-to-date, reflecting well the picture

of the mid-1990s. It has not only treated the issues that would be expected of any encyclopedia or dictionary-type of work on translation and translation studies by providing definitions or discussions of basic terms and concepts of the subject, but it has also dealt with a good many major theoretical issues that have concerned contemporary translation scholars. For example, the entries on translational approaches by Ian Mason, Peter Fawcett, Roger Bell, Basil Hatim, Myriam Salama-Carr, José Lambert, Umberto Eco and Siri Nergaard, Mark Shuttleworth, Michael Cronin, and Christina Schäffner have useful entries covering such contemporary approaches or theories as the *communicative/functional*, *linguistic*, *psycholinguistic/cognitive*, *text linguistics*, *interpretive*, *literary*, and *semiotic approaches* to translation, and the *polysystem theory* of translation, the *game theory* of translation and the *theory of 'translatorial action'*. The entry on *Translation Studies*, by Mona Baker, offers an even better example of how the editor of the book and her team of contributors have tried to bring their discussion of the subject up to date. Summarizing in broad terms what has been offered from ancient antiquity up to the present times on the study of translation, this entry can be looked upon as a very useful synthesis of what Translation Studies is all about. As it embodies the essence of Translation Studies as an independent academic discipline as well as that of the entire *Encyclopedia* under review, it is useful to quote a few lines from it to see how Baker defines the discipline:

The academic discipline which concerns itself with the study of translation has been known by different names at different times. Some scholars have proposed to refer to it as the 'science of translation' (Nida 1969, Wilss 1977/1982), others as 'translatology'—or 'traductologie' in French (Goffin 1971), but the most widely used designation today is 'translation studies'... 'Translation studies' is now understood to refer to the academic discipline concerned with the study of translation at large, including literary and non-literary translation, various forms of oral interpreting, as well as dubbing and subtitling... 'Translation studies' is also understood to cover the whole spectrum of research and pedagogical activities, from the developing theoretical frameworks to conducting individual case studies to engaging in practical matters such as training translators and developing criteria for

translation assessment. (Baker 1998: 277)

After this general description of the field of Translation Studies, Baker goes on to map out the territory of the discipline by adopting two of the most widely accepted models in the field, i. e., those of James Holmes (1972) and Gideon Toury (1995). The discipline is, according to her standard models, divided into two major areas: *pure translation studies* and *applied translation studies*. Under these two basic headings there can be found further divisions whose meanings are readily explainable respectively by the use of such terms as *product-oriented DTS* (text-focused studies which attempt to describe existing translations), *process-oriented DTS* (studies which attempt to investigate the mental processes that take place in translation), *function-oriented DTS* (studies which attempt to describe the function of translation in the recipient sociocultural context); *general translation theory*, *partial translation theories* (*medium-restricted*, e.g., theories of human as opposed to machine translation; *area-restricted*, i. e., restricted to specific linguistic or cultural groups; *rank-restricted*, i. e., theories dealing with specific linguistic ranks or levels; *text-type restricted*, e. g., theories of literary translation or Bible translation; *time-restricted*, i. e., theories dealing with translating texts from an older period as opposed to contemporary texts; or *problem-restricted*, e. g., theories dealing with the translation of metaphor or idioms), *translation training*, *translation aids* and *translation criticism*.

Finally, in describing where Translation Studies stands in relation to other academic disciplines, Mona Baker presents another helpful summary of views on the issue. In her opinion, “the study of translation has gone far beyond the confines of any one discipline and it has become clear that research requirements in this area cannot be catered for by any existing field of study” (Baker 1998: 280). Therefore, it should occupy a place of its own among other academic disciplines, though, as an ‘interdiscipline’, it “can and will hopefully continue to draw on a variety of discourses and disciplines” and “synthesize the insights it has gained from other fields of knowledge”.

A further characteristic of the *Encyclopedia* lies in the open-mindedness of Mona Baker and her international team of specialist contributors. Partly conditioned by the intrinsic nature of the *Encyclopedia* as a knowledge provider rather than a forum for dispute or polemic as in an anthology of essays, both the editor and the various contributors have tried

to describe the discipline as it has developed and present information as objectively as possible. Therefore, the wide range of issues that have concerned scholars in the discipline are all adequately represented in the book, no matter whether these issues are considered traditional or not. For example, apart from such traditional topics as *equivalence*, *literal approaches*, *literary translation*, *Bible translation*, *machine translation*, *shifts of translation*, *unit of translation*, *translatability*, *linguistic approaches*, and *communicative approaches*, a good many entries have been devoted to less-traditional issues such as *gender metaphoric in translation*, *models of translation*, *corpora in translation studies*, *semiotic approaches*, *speculative approaches*, *polysystem theory*, *game theory*, and *theory of 'translational action'*. In short, Mona Baker has tried to keep an open mind on what constitutes viable perspectives in the study of translation and what might legitimately be seen as relevant areas of concern, because she does not deem it good to “promote one approach... particularly comfortable and dismiss the rest” (Baker 1998: xiii) and because she believes that the success of Translation Studies as an academic discipline lies in “working towards greater unity and a more balanced representation of all areas of the discipline in research activities and in theoretical discussion” (Baker 1998: 279).

One of the common expectations of readers of any dictionary-type of publication is that the publication is an authoritative piece of work that they can always turn to whenever clarification is sought about a certain point at issue. Mona Baker's *Encyclopedia* enjoys this kind of authority in a number of ways. Firstly, the international distribution of contributors, quite unparalleled by similar undertakings in the discipline, can certainly be seen as having added a considerable measure of authority to the work. Secondly, to many people, it seems to be the first authoritative work on a multi-lingual, multi-cultural history of translation. Further, it may be particularly interesting to those audiences whose national history of translation is represented in the work, because it would be more interesting and beneficial to view their translation tradition within an international frame of reference, than to view it within its own terms of reference. Thirdly, and in a way most importantly, the authoritativeness of the *Encyclopedia* lies not only in its team of contributors all being well-established and distinguished scholars on their respective topics, but also in its including contributions in one way or another by many of the major writers in the field: Eugene Nida,

Susan Bassnett, Louis Kelly, Wolfram Wilss, Gideon Toury, Vilen Komissarov, Basil Hatim, Lawrence Venuti, Roger Bell, and Mona Baker herself.

However, apart from the *Encyclopedia's* strong points, it is also important to note if there are areas where improvements can be made. Perhaps no book can ever claim to be devoid of weaknesses, however 'strong' it may be considered to be. Therefore, the question that is of concern is not 'if' there are areas where the *Encyclopedia* may be improved, but rather, what weak areas there are and how they may be improved.

In this connection, there are three. First, as "comprehensiveness" is a quality that cannot be described in absolute, but in relative terms, the list of entries that could be included to make the *Encyclopedia* even more "comprehensive" is far from exhaustive. In fact, some of the common topics that the ordinary users of the *Encyclopedia*, or any encyclopedia of translation studies for that matter, might expect to find are rather conspicuously lacking. For example, in Part I of the work, there are no entries on such general issues as 'the nature of translation', 'principles of translation', 'criteria of translation', 'procedures of translation', 'functions of translation', 'status of translation', 'varieties of translation', 'textual studies of translation', 'dialectics of translation', 'temporal dimensions of translation', 'dictionaries of translation', 'role of translators', and 'relations between translator, author and receptor'. Thought it would not be realistic to try to include everything worthwhile in a one-volume book the size of the *Encyclopedia* under review, it would be felicitous to see these lacunae covered in the revised edition.

Secondly, the alphabetical arrangement of entries in the *Encyclopedia* is something about which this reviewer has reservations. Why not use thematic structuring instead? Of course different people may have different ideas about what thematic structures should look like, while alphabetic ordering may avoid all arguments. But in my opinion, an arrangement according to themes would be much more meaningful for an encyclopedia, whereas an alphabetical arrangement would be more suitable for a dictionary of terms in translation studies. It must be pointed out, though, that in this model the so called 'thematic structuring' of entries means 'thematic structuring' at the top level only. In other words, according to this model, all entries are grouped into a certain number of themes (e. g., twelve in the *Encyclopedia*, as suggested above by this reviewer), but within each thematic group, the

entries are nevertheless arranged in alphabetical order. Therefore, in the last analysis, what I propose is a mixed model of arrangement, and such a mixed model would prove more powerful than the model used by Mona Baker.

A further weakness of the *Encyclopedia* lies in the fact that the entries on ‘History and Traditions’ in Part II of the work do not seem very well balanced. On the one hand, more national histories and traditions of translation, especially in the eastern hemisphere, could have been included, for example, Korean, Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian, and Vietnamese, in order for the *Encyclopedia* to be more universally applicable. On the other hand, if there are entries on the “American tradition”, the “Latin American tradition”, and the “African tradition”, why should not there also be other regional traditions such as the “Asian tradition”, the “European tradition”, and the “Oceanic tradition” (if there is such a tradition)? In a similar manner, if there is a “Latin tradition”, why should not there be a ‘Classical Chinese tradition’ and a ‘Classical Arabic tradition’? Whatever answers the editor may have in store for all these questions, an overview entry on the world history of translation or national histories of translation in comparison will definitely help overcome a serious neglect in the study of translation, the neglect of developing a comparative science of translation or comparative translation studies (Tan 1997).

Pointing out some of the areas where improvements may be made does not in the least diminish the credit attributed to the book. I would agree that “for anyone with an academic or professional interest, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* is a practical and unique resource in a single and accessible volume”. Notable for its being comprehensive, up-to-date, open-minded, and authoritative, it will provide most valuable and useful reference to both the translation theorist and practitioner, specialists and laymen, and teachers and students of translation.

References

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