

Translation and Practice Theory



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Book Review

This is a timely and theoretically innovative book linking professional practice and translation theory. "By thinking deeply through the significance of the practice turn, Olohan provides a fascinating new perspective on problems at the very heart of Translation Studies" (Lavinia Heller). Citing a freelance translator Mounzer's problems as an example, in her introduction, Olohan demonstrates the significance and usefulness of a practice-theoretical approach to translating. Her aim is to conduct a "conceptual exploration designed to stretch the horizons of translation theory by proposing a holistic perspective that can help to explain the socio-material complexities of translation practice" (5). These attempts should be taken seriously by translation scholars and practitioners as it addresses the very central issues of translating. Moreover, her attention to the gradual growth in practice-oriented perspective on translation, in our view, can greatly meet the demand of the information era for translation practice.

Chapter 1

Olohan, in Chapter 1 firstly reflects on the two dominant paradigms in translation studies for decades—process-oriented and product-oriented translation studies which are mainly conducted through analysis on documentary datasets or experiments under controlled conditions. Pointing out the neglected workplace study in traditionally prioritized product-oriented and process-oriented translation studies, Olohan focuses her research on the performances of translation agents as they act in naturally occurring settings of translation production. After reviewing the few typical empirical studies of translation workplace regarded as the foundations stones for future ethnographic and workplace research, she proposed the methods of ethnography, in her volume, to observe PMs, translators and other administrative and technical personnel in four LSPs (Language Service Providers). She argues, at the end of this chapter, that the practice theory will accommodate many of the missing aspects in previous translation studies, by not attributing translation solely to rational decision-making of the individuals or an abstract or embrained interpretation but thinking about specific performances as well as an understanding of translation

that can be generalized from multitude of reproductions of specific performances. To understand the conceptual assumptions underlying the practice-theoretical approach, Olohan traces the philosophical roots and the relevant ideas of present-day practice scholars in philosophers or social theorists. She describes the overarching aim of these scholars as 'seeking a middle path between methodologically purpose-oriented individualism and systems-oriented holism' (19). Mainly drawing on Shovel's three-elements model and Schatzki's organizing structures and focusing her interest on reproduction, interconnectedness and evolution of practices.

Chapter 2

Olohan sets out, in Chapter 2, to propose a theoretical framework for translation practice based on which she carries out her research throughout the volume. According to Schatzki, practice is defined as 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (20). While Shovel's three-elements model focuses on different elements of practices—materials, competence and meaning and the links between them, Schatzki's organizing structure serves to organize activities to constitute a practice. She further distinguishes the practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity, the two basic categories of practices: dispersed and integrative practices and illustrates the dynamic and interconnected nature of practice. Olohan concludes the chapter by highlighting the significance and usefulness of practice theory and consider it 'will foreground the dynamic, relational and normatively governed accomplishment of translating, as an integrative practice performed in professional domains' [...] it will regard translators as carriers [...] and crossing points, or points of intersection for a multitude of practices'. it will consider how translating practice is entwined with and dependent on other practices' (34). Olohan discusses further the tripartite components presented in Shovel's model in the reproduction of translation practices in the following three chapters.

Chapter 3

She argues, in Chapter 3, that human body's performances of doings and sayings are part of the material that constitute practices

elements has long been neglected in a disembodied presence or disembodied voice in translation studies such as conference and theatre interpreting. By exemplifying how translation is embodied, she claims on the one hand the body is reconfigured in and by the practice and on the other hand, the practices are reconfigured by changes in bodily performances (37). Drawing on Shove's distinctions of roles of entities, Olohan divides other materials in translation practice into three categories: infrastructure, device and resources. She concludes this chapter by exemplifying the importance of materials in configuring translation practice through analysis of the performance of TM.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4 Olohan continues to explore the second element of a practice that is called competence which she defines as 'knowing-in-practice' (2017) similar to Shove's definition of "multiple forms of understanding and practical knowledgeability" (57) and Schatzki's practical understandings. She argues that the existing models of translation competence tend to be either capacity-based assumptions of knowledge as a relatively static, encoded product or performative formulations of the attributes or capacities of an individual translator while providing little guidance or insight on the situated enactment of translating practice. She points out that a practice-focused approach frames questions about knowing around the practice such as 'asking how a practice constitutes the knowledge bases on which its continued existence depends' (59). In contrast to dualistic relationship between knowledge and practice that is conceived as theoretical, formalized and linear, Olohan proposes that the practice-theoretical understanding of knowledge is processual, relational, corporeal and emergent.

After exploring materials and competence in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 respectively, Olohan further elaborates on the last constituent element of Shove's three-elements model. While acknowledging the broadness of Shove's concept of meaning, she structures around Schatzki's more useful notion of general understanding, rules and tele-affectivity in organizing the aspect of practice. She considers the more pertinent approach to general understanding is 'ideational elements to multiple practices' which can integrate or organize practices into cultural formations, serve to justify practice, ground and inform the intelligibility of practices. By compiling the small corpus of the promotional copy from the websites of the world's top 100 LSPs, Olohan illustrates the 'general sense' conveyed by those discursive articulations as global dimension, quality of translation services and translators configured in networks or teams, thus providing a snapshot to meanings or general understandings conveyed by the chosen LSPs. As far as rules are concerned, Olohan quotes Warde's "intermediation processes of codification and regulation by which practices are objectified" (77).

Chapter 5

She explains the "intermediation processes" as the standards of acceptable performances, rivalrous codifications and evaluation of performances. She also examines the ways in which practices are codified and formalized by professional associations, standardization bodies and auditing authorities such as texts, awarding of prizes, codes of ethics or conducts. Reflecting on the practice-theoretical notion of rules and concepts of norm theory, Olohan argues that both Herman's move towards social system theory and hers to practice theory are similarly motivated to go beyond description of translation product and process and seek to identify conceptual tools to facilitate understanding the role of translation in the social world. As to the last factor in the element of meaning 'teleo-affectivity', Olohan quotes the Schatzki's structure and defines it as "ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions, and moods". She also discusses the term "engagement", "motivations and emotions" by other social scholars in this aspect. As translation scholars have thus far focused to a very limited extent on such teleological or affective dimensions of translation practice, Olohan addresses the significance of the practice-theory perspective by which the effects are built into the practice.

Chapter 6

Drawing on Schatzki and Shove's ideas about interconnected practices and links (or practice bundles in Schatzki's terms) between the practices, in Chapter 6, Olohan explores the practice-theoretical concepts that can be employed to shed light on the nature of connections and interdependencies of the translation and other practices. Focusing on the interconnected practices of revising and reviewing, proofreading, editing and post-editing etc mainly carried out by LSP and the intertwining of translation with other related complex (Shove's term) or constellation (constellation) such as publishing and translator education, Olohan examines the operations of the LSP constitute the fabric of many more interconnected practices with co-dependencies that hang together to form larger constellations. She also discusses the centrality of the project management or vendor management in the actions chains which is mainly performed by the PM or the translator-PM serving at cross-points of practices.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 takes a practice-theoretical perspective to explain the evolving practices by tracing attendants' changes in materials, competence and meaning. As part of doings of the practice of translation, PEMT (post-editing machine translation) has played a significant role in the evolving translation practice materially configured through a CAT or TM interface, higher demand for rapid evaluation of the MT for translators and shared understandings of the changing practice associated with the teleological. Motivational and affective aspects. Olohan argues that the integration of PEMT

into the translation practice is a significant change in that it leads to a drop in the unit price of translation and an increasing demand for 'professional linguists who can interact with machine translation output'(115).

Olohan concludes by addressing the methodological approaches, challenges and suggestions for studying translation practices and related practices. Examining the first praxiographical accounts of Mol's research from the science and technology literature, Olohan draws inspiration to take an ethnographical research, which is described as involving 'the creation of primary data through personal interaction with research subjects in a project of creating or refining generalizations about human social life'. The three types or genres of ethnographic research identified by Katz (2019) as iconic ethnography, comparative analytical ethnography and labeled modeling ethnography, so goes Olohan's argument, are useful in studies of translation practices for addressing different aims and research questions, with the third genre more popular where studies of specific, sited practices and other accounts are abstracted into understandings or modeling of the practices. Olohan also points out challenges (the choice of sites, the determination of relevant selection criteria, gaining access to the field) as well as opportunities of the practice-theoretical approach. She offers some suggestions for research projects conceptually informed by practice theory and aimed to empirically investigate current and past translation practices. Honestly, she acknowledges the neglected area of the practice-theoretical perspective in large social phenomena and power issues, which is also our points of concern.

This is a highly innovative work in that it attempts to provide a new theoretical perspective on the heart of translation study and shed light on the dilemma on the current translation research. What we concern here is, as addressed by Olohan, the unexplored aspects of the cultural and historical investigations of the underlying causes of the concurrent and past translation practices. Translation studies have undergone the linguistic turn and cultural turn, in which it resorts too much on other discipline thus losing its own independence and status. therefore this 'practice turn' should be, as Olohan suggests, the expansion and combination of practice theory with other approaches to maximize the multiple ontologies and compatibilities of translation studies. As the theoretical-practice approach continues to expand the horizons of translation theory by understanding the working mechanism of translation practice and establish and enrich its own conceptualization and formulation, it would gain deeper insight into the nature of translation studies and lay solid theoretical foundation for future development.

Overall, the volume is an important contribution to the translation studies, because it provides a new orientation in future translation studies, catering greatly to the AI and big data era and thus theoretically and practically insightful. It could be a guidebook for those interested in the research of translation practice and in the communication studies as well. With the rapid development of MT and the great demand of PEMT, the theoretical-practice approach must be infused with new spirit and innovative power. As Olohan indicates, much more work like hers is in great need to investigate the less studied but important area in understanding the nature and working mechanism of translation practice.



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