

Research Models in Translation Studies II

29 April - 2 May 2011

Doing Interdisciplinary Research with Disciplined Neighbours: the Multidisciplinarity of Translation Studies

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This paper will review the relationship between translation studies and 'neighbouring' humanities disciplines. It will examine the extent to which the latter have transgressed disciplinary territories to draw on theoretical, methodological or ideological developments within translation studies. My focus will not be on how translation studies can adopt useful theories and methods from other disciplines but on the valuable ways in which it can contribute to other disciplines such as history, religious studies as well as the study of languages, literatures, cultures and so on. I will argue that scholars who have studied various types of cross-cultural encounters across time have not fully taken into account that translation is at the heart of intercultural communication and that the disciplinary knowledge of translation studies can challenge other disciplines in new directions.

In the course of my research on colonial translations in South Asia, I have found that the full significance of acts of translation has not been considered across the various disciplines or that translation histories in each domain have not been studied comparatively to examine how translations in one domain may have influenced the development in other domains. For instance, it is standard practice for scholarship on religions and/or languages in colonial South Asia to state that particular texts were translated and made available in a given number of languages in a specific year. However, the fact that the practice of translation involved the setting up of common interpretive frameworks against which almost all aspects of South Asian culture were evaluated and categorized is not given sufficient consideration. Similarly, scholars working on theology/Bible translation on the one hand and literary translation on the other continue to regard these domains as parallel and discrete acts of translation in the Indian context. In doing so, they fail to take cognizance of the fact that translation was a significant context within which a shared archive of knowledge was constructed, thus influencing the way colonizers and colonized thought about themselves and each other. By way of illustration, I will focus briefly on three such linked domains from the South Asian colonial context: the construction of 'religious' categories; the development of new ways of understanding the relationship between languages; and the training in translation methods given to colonial Indians with knowledge of more than one language.