Andrew Chesterman. On the idea of a theory *Across Languages and Cultures*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	On the idea of a theory is the title of a paper written by Andrew Chesterman (2007), a great scholar in the realm of Translation Studies (TS). The paper has been published in the journal of *Across languages and Cultures*, a leading journal in Translation Studies. There are many concepts in Translation Studies (TS) which have been given different definitions. There is no consistent terminology. One can pay attention to different definitions of the key concepts of "translation", "equivalence" and "strategy".

Introduction

The very idea of a theory is also a rather confusing concept since different scholars define it differently and from their own perspective. So this paper is an important piece of contribution since it specifically deals with the concept of theory in the discipline of Translation Studies.

In the introduction, Chesterman talks about certain basic points on theory which almost all scholars do agree upon. He discusses the etymology of the term theory and asserts that a theory is a way of looking at something', in order to contemplate it and understand it better. In this broad sense, we can say that a theory is a helpful point of view. I take (better) understanding to be the general goal of any theory. A theory of translation is thus a view of translation – or some part or aspect of it –which helps us to understand it better.

In the second part entitled *description, explanation* the author talks about the different views on these notions in research which as I see it is simply a review of literature on these concepts in research and does not help to the main issue of discussion. In other words, I don't think that this part really paves the way for the main discussion which follows.

The main part of the paper focuses on the different types or notions of theory. He considers theory to be of five types including myth, metaphor, model, hypothesis and structured research program. It is in this part that I notice certain discrepancies among different scholars.

Concerning myth and metaphors what the author says is in line with other scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Armstrong (2005). The third type is a controversial one in a sense that Chesterman in the present paper considers theory and model to be synonymous. It seems that Rodgers in his book *Translation and Translating* is not in line with what Chesterman does believe. He considers a model is a concrete representation of a theory not a theory itself in a sense that a theory is abstract while a model is concrete. A theory to Rodger (1991) is an abstract concept in the mind of the speakers while a model is a concrete manifestation of that theory.

Of the five types of theory, the author considers hypothesis to be the most basic one. He asserts that Myths and metaphors can be seen as interpretive hypotheses, to be tested in use.

Models are hypotheses too, to be tested against evidence; and the same can be said of the cluster of hypotheses and assumptions which make up a research programme: you try them out, and if they do not work adequately, you eventually try something else."

His last notion of theory is the *structured research programme*. This theory has two main parts: A hard core and a protective belt. The hard core consists of fundamental principles and assumptions which are not questioned within the programme but taken for granted. The protective belt consists of supplementary assumptions and hypotheses to be tested, protecting the hard core.

The author, then, has a thorough discussion on how myth, metaphor, model, hypothesis and structured research program are represented in TS. For example, he aptly mentions that the history of TS is full of metaphors such as:

Translation is (like) imitation.

The translator is like a painter who shows a person's body but not his soul.

The translator digests the original, turning it into blood and food.

To translate is to follow in the footsteps of the original.

A translation is the rival of the original, striving to beat it at its own game.

The translator is the servant or slave of the original.

A translator is a magpie among peacocks.

To my way of thinking the most important contribution of the present paper is the point that the author considers translation itself a theory. He asserts that "a translation itself can be seen as a theory of how the source text can be translated, in all the five senses outlined above."

As it was mentioned before, the author considers hypothesis to be the most basic of all the five notions of theory. Translation constitutes a hypothesis about the source text and how it can be interpreted. This idea is in line with Pym (1995) that a translator makes a claim that his or her translation is equivalent in some relevant way to the source text, a claim that is tested by translation readers, clients and critics.

On the whole, the paper presents a very stimulating reading for translation teachers and students and the readers will have a better picture of what the very notion of *theory* is.

References

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