

# Translation Studies and Reception Studies

## Intersections and Overlaps

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### ***Abstract***

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*The aim of this paper is to give an overview of major theoretical assumptions in Reception Studies and Translation Studies and show how various concepts and constructs can overlap as in the case of Hans Robert Jauss's 'horizon of expectation(s)' and Andrew Chesterman's 'expectancy norms', both referring to a reflection of the expectancies of the target readers on translations.*

### ***Keywords***

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*Translation Studies, Reception Studies, horizon of expectations, the Manipulation School, functionalist approaches.*

## **1. Insights on Reception Theory**

Reception theory started to be developed in Western Germany at the University of Constance in the late 1960s and early 1970s marking a shift from traditional methods that emphasize the production of texts or their close examination to the reading and reception of literary texts. Also known as 'The Aesthetics of Reception' (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) and sometimes translated as 'the poetics of reception', the new direction in literary criticism rose against former critical schools such as Formalism and Marxism. Thus, reception theory

“would avoid the mistakes of Russian Formalism on the one hand (which paid insufficient attention to the sociology and historicity of literature) and of Marxism, with its grim historical determinism, on the other, while also building on their insights. The new model would acknowledge the historicity of texts, but also allow for the aesthetic response of readers in the present (any present of reading)”. [5, 3]

Reception theory became known in the 1980s through the works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser.

### **1.1 Hans Robert Jauss and the reader's 'horizon of expectations'**

The concept of 'horizon', first coined by Karl Popper and then employed by philosophers and sociologists such as E. H. Gombrich, Karl Mannheim, and

later by phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer is enriched by Jauss who adds the expectations of common readers and critics during a certain historical period. According to his theoretical assumptions,

“the analysis of the literary experience of the reader avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology if it describes the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works and from the opposition between poetical and practical language. (...) The horizon of expectations of a work allows one to determine its artistic character by the kind and degree of its influence on a presupposed audience. If one characterizes as aesthetic distance the disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work whose reception can result in a ‘change of horizons’ through negation or familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness, then this aesthetic distance can be objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience’s reactions and criticism’s judgment (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding)” [4, 22-25].

Although Jauss gave up the concept of ‘horizon of expectations’ in his later works due to the contradictions with other critical assumptions (such as Adorno’s negative dialectics), this remains a landmark in reception studies, facilitating interpretation, literary analysis and historical situatedness. Jauss did not explicitly refer to translations when he coined syntagms such as ‘the horizon of expectations’ and ‘the change of horizons’. However, his expertise can be extended to the public’s constant demand for new translations to suit a change in taste or quality.

Another key concept in Jauss’s reception aesthetics is ‘aesthetic distance’, i.e. “the degree by which a literary work departs from the horizon of expectations of its first readers” [4, 139].

## **1.2 Wolfgang Iser’s ‘aesthetic response’**

The other major representative of the Schools of Constance is Wolfgang Iser, best known for his theory of ‘aesthetic response’ that focuses on the interaction between reader and text and on the unique cooperation and

interpretation that the reader brings to the text. Furthermore, the author distinguishes between a theory of aesthetic response which stresses the interpretive dimension and a theory of reception that is more concerned with a historical dimension of texts and their readers:

“Aesthetic response is (...) to be analyzed in terms of a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction. It is called aesthetic response because although it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus (...).” [2, I]

In Iser’s aesthetics, a text exists if it has a reader that is actively involved in its interpretation, i.e. in filling the gaps of the text (‘places of indeterminacy’). Reader and text cannot be separated and the former comes with his or her personal experience to complete the indeterminacies of the latter (‘concretization’). The reader is subjective in his or her enterprise, hence the justification of multiple interpretations over time. Wolfgang Iser maintains a formalistic view according to which a text sets norms to guide and thus limit its readers. Readers wander through a text and build projections (‘protentions’) of new experience and reinterpretations (‘retentions’) of past experience.

## **2. Translation Studies**

Translation Studies emerged as a discipline in the 70s although considerations on translation and translators have been made long before (an instance for the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay, *The Task of the Translator*, 1923). Initially, developing either on a linguistic or literary track, Translation Studies was viewed “as a minor sub-discipline of traditional philology and linguistics” [6, vii]. However, since its beginning, the new discipline has taken several turns [Snell-Hornby 2006]: a cultural ‘pragmatic’ turn in the 70s [Jirj Levy, Eugene Nida and Katharina Reiss] still committed to a linguistic stance; a ‘cultural’ turn in the 80s [also Dimitriu 2006] which allowed TS to emerge from the previous linguistic path into a new discipline, i.e. Descriptive Translation Studies and among other achievements, skopos theory is worth mentioning; last but not least, an ‘empirical’ turn in the 90s which produced notable works in the fields of translation and interpreting.

Drawing on disciplines such as literary studies, linguistics, ethics, philosophy, sociology, Cultural Studies, information science, cognitive science,

psychology, etc., since its establishment Translation Studies went interdisciplinary adopting philosophical approaches (George Steiner), ideological and cultural viewpoints (The Polysystem Theory and The Manipulation School) postcolonial positions (Rosemary Arrojo, Gayatri Spivak) or gender studies-based assumptions (Louise von Flotow). As Mary Snell-Hornby argues, Translation Studies became

“an interdiscipline that goes “beyond language”, concentrating on significant terms introduced or areas developed during the decade: Toury’s notion of norms and Chesterman’s concept of memes in their relation to translation ethics, non-verbal communication and multimodal/multimedial translation as for stage and screen, with examples of texts and studies carried out during the 1990s” [9, 3]

## **2.1 The Manipulation School. Andre Lefevere’s ‘refraction’ and ‘rewriting’**

The Manipulation School is a very important theoretical branch of Translation Studies which revealed translation as a vital component of the large socio-cultural and literary mechanisms of the receiving culture. André Lefevere is by far the most representative scholar of the movement; he envisaged translations as the end product expression of historical, ideological, economic, literary and linguistic constraints of the receiving cultural spaces. According to him, translations are not just equivalents of the source texts in the traditional sense of the term; translations cannot be transparent and translators should not allow themselves to be the impartial, neutral, ethical, intercultural mediators that tradition wants them to be. Lefevere argues that translations are manipulation tools rendering translators manipulation agents. This outcome consists of detailed investigations on translations that were undertaken under the influence of certain ideologies, in different historical periods, and various literary climates. Lefevere’s terminology includes conceptual and terminological constructs such as: refraction, rewriting, cultural authority, target culture constraints (ideology, patronage, poetics, ‘professionals’), (textual and conceptual) grids and cultural capital. All these notions can be extremely helpful in describing the most important aspects of the reception of literary translation in the target culture.

Lefevere first employed the term *refraction* in his essay ‘Translated Literature: Towards an Integrated Theory’ (1981) so as to express the distorted projection of an original text by translation, due to the multiple constraints the ST is subjected to. *Refraction* defines “texts that have been processed for a certain

audience or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology” [1, 67] and it refers to both translations that refract the initial image of an original text, and to criticism and anthologizing, among others.

However, since 1985, André Lefevere replaced *refraction* with the more complex and improved concept of *rewriting* in a new perspective on translated texts as images of the original:

“Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of literature and a society.” [3, VII].

Translated texts are influenced by factors such as a patron’s demands, a given literary doctrine, a particular social, political and economic context, certain (translation, literary, editing, critics’) standards which distort them from the original, by allowing only certain comfortable elements to be rendered in the target text and culture. Translators are ideological tools of distortion through rewriting and recreation constrained by social or literary factors and can also be called creators.

## **2.2 Functionalist approaches to translation: Christiane Nord’s model**

Christiane Nord’s functionalist model is the most comprehensive didactic tool for the analysis of (informative, expressive or operative) text types. The German TS scholar was inspired by Hans Vermeer’s ‘skopos’ theory that defined the aim and purpose of a translation as determined by the needs and expectations of the reader in his receiving culture. The ‘skopos’ demanded “faithfulness to the original” and equivalence [9, 51].

She develops a translation-oriented model of text functions, improving Reiss’s text typology to meet translator training requirements. She draws on Bühler’s three linguistic functions: referential – oriented towards referent or context, expressive – oriented towards the sender and appellative – oriented towards the recipient. However, she adds a fourth function to the category, i.e. the phatic function oriented towards the communicative act and inspired from Roman Jakobson’s model of language functions of the 60s.

As far as literary translation is concerned, the German scholar analyzes the aspects of intracultural literary communication, so as to identify the features that distinguish literary from non-literary communication and texts (7, 80). Nord draws the landmark functionalist model for text analysis in TS by identifying the agents of literary communication and the communicative situation in which literary productions occur. In the analysis of a literary text, she divided the factors employed in two categories: *extratextual* (sender/author, sender's/ author's intention, reader/ receiver, place, time, motive, function/ effect) and *intratextual factors* (subject matter, content, presupposition, lexis, sentence structure, suprasegmental features, composition) (1991, 1997).

### **3. Reception Theory and Translation Studies. Possible Intersections and Overlaps**

In our opinion, possible intersections and overlaps can be established at the level of several notions in reception theory and translation studies. We merely gave a bird's eye view of a selection of concepts operating in the two disciplines. Thus, we left aside the theory of norms in translation because we believe that is it not particularly relevant for the study of a specific translated literature in its reception as reflected by the professional readers of the target culture. However Andrew Chesterman's expectancy norms could correspond to Hans Robert Jauss's horizon of expectations, a reflection of the expectancies of the target readers on translations. Such norms can be related to a tradition of translation in the receiving culture, ideological factors or texts belonging to the same genre, allowing translation assessments since the readers envisage the 'right' translation for every type of text.

Norms here are to be understood not in the traditional sense of guidelines that translators had to follow in order to accomplish what the authors of such discourses envisaged as proper translations, but in the sense given by Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) as developed by Gideon Toury. This means that in our overlapping of concepts, the expectancy norms (or product norms, similar to Toury's operational and initial norms) refer to translation as a decision making process, i.e. a perspective according to which "at every level, the translator has to choose one option from several possible alternatives, and this decision process implies compulsory choices – in the case of language-specific grammatical forms – and non-compulsory ones, which translators could still make on a regular basis" [1, 48].

Moreover, intersections between Lefevere's concepts of refraction and rewriting can also be found with Jauss's change of horizon in the sense that refraction and rewriting are necessary, as texts need to be adapted to suit the tastes of a particular audience whose horizon changes over time, not to mention their adjustment to fit a certain poetics or ideology (both at the level of translations and criticism). This is illustrated by the demand for new translations of old texts in various historical periods to cope with linguistic and ideological changes.

Nord's extratextual factor of effect or function intersects with Iser's aesthetic response since the former pertains to the poetic or aesthetic effect that the translated text produces on its readers defined as "the use a receiver makes of a text or the meaning that the text has for the receiver (...), the main guiding principle of the translation process" (8, 138). Even though the latter concept does not explicitly refer to translation, focusing on the interaction between reader and text in general, it can be argued that not only an original text, but also a translation may set norms to guide its readers, thus awakening an effect or aesthetic response in them. Readers in the target cultures use their own personal experience to fill the gaps of the text or its places of indeterminacy; the more target oriented the text, the easier their task to fill the gaps and viceversa, i.e. the more source oriented the translation, the harder they cope with the places of indeterminacy.

### **Conclusions**

As shown above, reception studies and translation studies have something to learn from each other. We have proved that many of their concepts taken as such are extremely useful in the reception study of a particular translated literature and we gave the instance of Canadian literature as seen by Romanian professional readers in various historical periods. The concepts may be often be envisaged in intersections or overlaps as in the case of Chesterman's expectancy norms and Jauss's horizon of expectations, Nord's effect or function and Iser's aesthetic response or Lefevere's concepts of refraction and rewriting and Jauss's change of horizon.

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