

What do (we think) we know about
indirectness in literary translation?
A tentative review of the state-of-the-art and
possible research avenues

HANNA PIĘTA

Universitat de Lisboa – Centre d'Estudis Anglesos

Resum: Els estudis amb un enfocament específic en Traducció Indirecta (TI) sovint deixen entreveure que s'ha generat poc coneixement sobre aquest fenomen, malgrat el seu ús habitual en la comunicació intercultural. De fet, la TI és un fenomen que combina una quantitat relativament petita de recerca amb una terminologia diversa, una manca de consens a nivell conceptual i escasses directrius metodològiques. En conseqüència, per començar a omplir aquest buit, l'objectiu últim d'aquest article és posar en relleu el concepte de TI, (tornar a?) situar-lo en el mapa dels Estudis de Traducció i encoratjar futures investigacions empíriques. Per dur-ho a terme, aquest treball es proposa (1) fer una nova lectura de l'estat de la qüestió de la recerca actual sobre aquest fenomen (mitjançant la presentació dels resultats d'una breu revisió bibliogràfica); (2) fer una aportació al coneixement actual (resumint, explorant i qüestionant suposicions clau que s'acostumen a fer pel que fa a la TI); i (3) reflexionar sobre les futures línies d'investigació (assenyalant els àmbits que necessiten un desenvolupament urgent). En fer-ho, posarem l'èmfasi principal sobre la traducció literària.

Paraules clau: traducció indirecta, traducció literària, llengües i cultures perifèriques.

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Abstract: Studies with a specific focus on Indirect Translation (ITr) often suggest that little knowledge has been produced on this phenomenon, in spite of the frequent use of ITr in intercultural communication. Indeed, ITr is a phenomenon that combines a relatively small amount of research with varying terminology, lack of consensus on the conceptual level and limited methodological recommendations. Therefore, in an effort to address this gap, this paper seeks to foreground the concept of ITr, to put it (back?) on the map of Translation Studies and to encourage future empirical research. To do so, the paper will aim to (1) shed new light on the state-of-the-art of current research on this phenomenon (by presenting the results of a brief bibliographical review); (2) add value to the current sum total of knowledge (by summarizing, exploring and challenging key assumptions typically made with regard to ITr); and (3) reflect on future research avenues (by indicating areas in need of urgent development). While doing so, the main focus will be on literary translation.

Keywords: indirectness, indirect translation, literary translation, peripheral languages and cultures.

1 Introduction

A number of studies dealing with Indirect Translation (ITr) mention that ITr is a much neglected area of research. St. André (2009: 232) goes as far as to call ITr «one of the most understudied phenomena in translation studies today». While this claim might be viewed as a slight overstatement, there is no denying that research with a specific focus on the concept of ITr remains extremely – and undeservedly – marginal in translation studies.

There exist a number of plausible reasons for this neglect. The first reason that comes to mind is that ITr reportedly replicates the stigma attached to translation itself (if one assumes that a translation is a poor copy of the original, then an indirect translation is inevitably a poor copy of this poor copy) and is thus heavily loaded with negative connotations (see, e.g., Radó 1964: 15–16, Ringmar 2007, St. André 2010). A telling example is offered by the recommendation by UNESCO (1976), in which it is suggested that ITr should be used «only where absolute-

ly necessary». A statement by Landers (2001: 131) is also a good case in point: «Predicated on what I consider the sound translational principles [...], I have never done an indirect translation and have no plans to do one». Furthermore, research in translation studies predominantly concerns the exchange between the so-called (hyper)central (Heilbron 1999) languages, whereas studies on ITr tend to be carried out by scholars focusing on the transfer between the so-called (semi)peripheral languages (Heilbron 1999); that is, a much less commonly studied linguistic combination.

On a positive note, however, it seems that research on ITr is finally taking off and has recently gained more visibility in the translation studies community. Witness, for instance, the rapidly increasing number of scholarly publications; as reported in Pięta (2012: 311), between 2009 and 2011 (the timespan for which bibliometric data is analysed) at least thirteen papers and monographs focusing on indirect literary transfer were issued. Another telling indication of the growing academic interest in ITr is the noticeable surge in the number of dissemination events: to my very best knowledge in 2013 alone there were at least three separate scientific meetings specifically centred on ITr, taking place in Lisbon (<http://www.etc.ulices.org/jet/cfp.html>), GERMERSHEIM (<http://www.fbo6.uni-mainz.de/est/51.php>) and Barcelona (<http://trilcat.upf.edu/activitats/>).

Notwithstanding these significant developments in recent years, and irrespective of its frequent use in intercultural communication, ITr has not yet asserted itself as a research field in its own right within the broader framework of translation studies. As a result, little empirical knowledge has been produced on this phenomenon and much research remains to be done, whether in terms of terminological, conceptual or methodological issues.

As regards the terminology, there is no consensus concerning the metalanguage in English (the *lingua franca* of the translation studies discipline, cf. Cronin 2009: 172), leading to the coexistence of a plethora of similar but not necessarily synonymous terms (such as «double», «indirect», «intermediate», «mediated», «mixed», «pivot», «relay(ed)»,

«second-hand» translation).¹ It is therefore striking that, even when they acknowledge the unstable metalanguage, very few authors offer an explanation for their terminological choices (but see, e.g., Dollerup 2000, Pięta 2012).² In many other languages the terminology is not so varied, at least on initial analysis, but this is mainly due to it being very often underdeveloped.³

There is also no agreement on the conceptual level (see in this respect 2.1). On this note, one should also point to the conspicuous lack of a consistent typology: indeed, studies proposing systematic classifications of indirectness are next to impossible to find. Likewise, little knowledge has been produced on the correlation between ITr and (i) the neighbouring concepts (e.g., retranslation or back-translation), as well as (ii) the currently disparate concepts (such as censorship, hybridity, post-colonialism, or voice in translation, to name but a few).

In the matter of methodology, one could certainly point to the lack of explicit models for identifying (different types of) ITr, let alone the most plausible mediating language(s) and/or text(s) (but see, in this respect, Pięta 2012: 315–317 & 2013: 46–49, Ringmar 2007: 7–9, Toury 1995: 134). To recap, there is a clear need for reliable guidelines on how to overcome the obstacles that typically occur in empirical studies on ITr.

Accordingly, to address this gap in translation studies research, this paper will aim to (1) shed new light on the state-of-the-art of current research on this phenomenon (by presenting the results of a brief biblio-

¹ Of course, this observation can be extrapolated to the status of translation studies terminology in general. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that some degree of standardization in metalanguage concerning ITr would be of use.

² On this note, it should be born in mind that in the present article the term «indirect translation» is adopted. This term has been chosen because (i) it seems to be more frequently used than other terms (see Pięta 2012); (ii) the corresponding antonym is easily identified (direct translation); (iii) it is often used by laymen and professionals in different areas of publishing industry (arguably, it is beneficial to have translation studies terminology coincide with practitioners' terminology).

³ For instance, there is no well-established Portuguese term for «indirectness» (but see, in this respect, Pięta 2013: 37, where the term «indirectude» is coined).

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graphical review); (2) add value to the current body of knowledge (by systematizing, exploring and challenging key assumptions typically made with regard to ITr); and (3) reflect on future research avenues (by indicating areas in need of urgent development). While doing so, the main focus will be on literary translation. The primary motive of this paper is to foreground the concept of ITr, to put it (back?) on the map of Translation Studies and to encourage systematic empirical research.

As regards the structure of the paper, it consists of two main parts. The first section presents a review of the state-of-the-art of research and provides tentative answers to five key questions concerning the phenomenon under study, namely: (i) what is ITr? (ii) where does it occur? (iii) when does it occur? (iv) why does it occur? (v) what are its effects? The second part includes a brief summary of perspectives for future research.

2 A tentative review of the state-of-the-art of research

2.1 What is ITr?

ITr tends to be defined from a layman's perspective – as obtained in December 2013 by means of a survey of fifteen randomly-selected respondents aged 20 to 72 who were not involved in translation studies research or practice – as a translation made via mediating translated text, in a process involving three different languages.

From a scholarly perspective, however, there seems to be much less agreement in this regard. Many studies take ITr for granted and do not provide any definition of this concept. Other studies provide only *de facto* (not explicit) definitions. As a result, publications offering explicit definitions of the concept in question are few and far between (see Annex for a selection of these definitions). Therefore, it is often not clear what the term ITr actually means.

Nor is it clear where exactly (or indeed whether) ITr begins and ends, as there are fundamental discrepancies between some of the most frequently used definitions. Firstly, while some authors (e.g., Špirik 2011:

51) define ITr as a product (either deliberately or *de facto*), others (e.g., Pym 2011: 80, Sin-Wai 2004: 104, Shuttleworth & Cowie 1996: 76) consider it to be a process. Secondly, while some authors (e.g., Bauer 1999, Frank 1991, Górska 2013, Landers 2001: 130, MonAKO Glossary 1997, Pięta 2013, St. André 2009: 230) consider that ITr should involve (at least) three different languages (thus making it impossible to consider intra-lingual translations as ITr), others do not mention this requirement (e.g., Gambier 1994 and 2003, Ringmar 2012). Thirdly, some authors (e.g., Dollerup 2000 and 2009) contend that the mediating text cannot have a readership of its own, whereas others do not mention this as a prerequisite, thus (deliberately or *de facto*) allowing cases where the mediating text is meant for publication and not merely used as a stepping-stone to the ultimate target text to be considered as ITr.⁴ Finally, certain authors (e.g., Kittel & Frank 1991) propose that the mediating language should differ from the ultimate target language, thus making it impossible to consider retranslation (L₁–L₂–L₂) as ITr but making it possible to consider back-translation (L₁–L₂–L₁) as ITr. Others, in turn, specify that the ultimate source language should differ from the ultimate target language (e.g., Dollerup 2000: 19), thus making it impossible to consider back-translation (L₁–L₂–L₁) as ITr but making it possible to consider retranslation as ITr.

2.2 *Where does ITr occur?*

It is commonly held that ITr occurs between (geographically/linguistically) distant languages of weak diffusion – also known as dominated (Casanova 2002), less-translated (Branchadell & West 2005), minor (Cronin 2009) or (semi)peripheral (Heilbron 1999) languages. This is often the case if we operate with narrow definitions of ITr such as

⁴ A good example of cases where the mediating text is unpublished and used merely as a stepping-stone to the ultimate target text is the practice of «podstrochnik» (interlinear cribs), predominant in the Soviet project of literary translation (see, in this respect, Witt 2013).

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those mentioned above, e.g., which exclude intralingual translation. However, things become more complicated if we take broader definitions into account, e.g., which make it possible to consider retranslations (i.e., texts mediated by preexisting text(s) in the ultimate target language) as ITrs. Indeed, if we consider retranslation as a subset of ITr, it seems perfectly possible to study ITr also in the context of communication between the central languages.

More importantly, and more to the point, past research has shown that in order for ITr to occur, languages do not need to be distant from each other. For example, Portuguese and Spanish are neither geographically nor linguistically distant yet, as demonstrated by Bueno Maia (2012), the literary transfer between these languages was mostly indirect until the late 19th century, i.e., mediated via French language and culture.

2.3 When does ITr occur?

It is commonly assumed that ITr belongs to the past or, at the very least, is becoming more and more rare (see, e.g., Jianzhong 2003: 202). Current research often contributes to this perception, as most of the studies concerned with ITr are historically oriented.

While a large body of work can support the above-mentioned assumption, counterevidence can also be found. For instance, as shown in Pięta (2012: 318), over 30% of Portuguese book-length translations of Polish literature published between 2001 and 2010 are indirect. On this note, it should also be taken into account that while from 1990s onwards the Portuguese ITrs of Polish literary texts have regressed proportionally, they have in fact increased in terms of absolute numbers.

Moreover, indirectness remains common practice in machine translation and in audiovisual translation, as well as in community and conference interpreting. All in all, it seems that the phenomenon of indirectness, in its varied guises, is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. As pertinently pointed out by Ringmar (2012: 143)

globalization will [...] produce phenomena like [...] a sudden world-wide interest in Icelandic crime fiction, without necessarily providing translators from Icelandic to match this demand. Furthermore, the increasing dominance of English in most, if not all, target cultures tends to marginalize translations (and translators) from other [source languages], adding to the appeal of English IT[r]s. [...] [T]he general literary taste may consequently be anglicized to the extent that English mediating will not only be tolerated, but actually preferred.

2.4 *Why does ITr occur?*

Probably the most commonly cited reason for the occurrence of ITr is the complete lack or temporary unavailability of translators with linguistic competences necessary to produce a direct translation. This, in turn, leads to claims that «in today's world there is little justification for [ITr]» (Landers 2001: 131). Nevertheless, other research has already highlighted a number of other causes that explain why ITr is still standard practice in intercultural communication.

For instance, in my previous research (Pięta 2013), focused on the Portuguese translations of Polish literature, I came across a number of cases where ITr is used not owing to a lack of knowledge of the ultimate source language but rather for the sake of cost-effectiveness. Since translations from peripheral languages tend to be more costly than those from central languages, commissioning an ITr based on a central language often proves to be more affordable.

Similarly, ITr can serve as a means of mitigating the risks necessarily involved in the process of producing and distributing literary texts. Indeed, contracting a translator who lacks knowledge of the ultimate source language but who has previous experience and proven reliability may help in ensuring the high quality and timely delivery of translated texts.

Furthermore, censors, authors, literary agents and publishers are known to use ITr as an instrument of control over the contents of the ultimate target text (see, e.g., Frank 2004: 806, Gambier 2003: 59, Marín

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Lacarta 2012, Zaborov 2011: 2071). A translation policy implemented in the USSR is a good case in point:

the Soviets introduced a tacit rule that a book written in a language other than Russian had to be translated into Russian before it could be translated into other languages, since a direct contact of minority cultures with the West could lead to independent cultural initiatives (Kuhiewicz 2008: 14).

Another illustrative example can be found in Frank (2004: 806):

T.S. Elliot's [...] personal authorization of the French translation [of *The Waste Land*] by Jean de Menasce motivated the second German translator, E.R. Curtius, to adopt a number of de Menasce's doubtful solutions, although otherwise he used the English text.

Moreover, ITr may be prompted by the unavailability of the ultimate source text, resulting from censorial restrictions or geographical/temporal distance between cultures.

Finally, the use of ITr may be motivated by the prestige of the meditating cultures and their literary models (see, e.g., Boulogne 2008: 14, Graeber & Roche 1988: 55). In these cases, ITr may not only be tolerated but also preferred.

2.5 What are the effects of ITr?

The general perception, common to translation practitioners and scholars alike, is that ITr is necessarily inferior to direct translation. Nevertheless, studies concerned with this issue have repeatedly demonstrated that this is not always true. As usefully argued by Radó (1975: 51), the success or failure of ITr

will depend on the talent of the translator as well as on the quality of the intermediate translation which he uses. If both are excellent, the result will be hardly distinguishable from a direct translation. In fact, it can be even better than a mediocre translation made directly from the original.

Another common presumption is that ITr results in differences that automatically increase the distance between the ultimate source and target texts. For instance, as Landers puts it (2001: 131), during indirect literary transfer «something akin to Xerox effect takes place: a copy of a copy of a copy loses sharpness and detail with each successive passage through the process». Admittedly, ITr *can* result in shifts that further remove the ultimate target text from the denotative fidelity than the mediating text. However, research has shown that this cannot be taken for granted. For instance, Edström (1991: 10–11) counters this presumption by citing cases where the ultimate target text is closer to the ultimate source text than the mediating text.

Moreover, systematic research on the effects of relay interpreting (see, for example, Mackintosh 1983) found no significant difference in message loss between direct and relay interpreting. Similar studies in ITr are therefore called for in order to verify whether this claim also holds true in the case of indirect transfer of literary texts.

All things considered, I would argue that recourse to ITr can also lead to quite positive results. To begin with, had it not been for ITr, certain world literature classics from peripheral cultures would not have been disseminated in languages of so-called weak diffusion (or, at the very least, their inclusion would have been delayed). Take, for instance, the case of the Portuguese reception of Russian classics: had they not been translated via French, they would have become available to the Portuguese-reading public only as late as the 1990s. ITr is therefore the most efficient, and sometimes the only, means of inclusion for cultural products from peripheral cultures.

Likewise, ITr can be perceived as token of widespread respect or admiration for the ultimate source culture. This has been usefully illustrated by Hung (2005: 74–75, cited in St. André 2010), who suggests that from the standpoint of the rulers of China, ITr was actually a sign of prestige, «because it demonstrated that even distant kingdoms that needed to rely on [ITr] in order to communicate with the Chinese were eager to do so».

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Similarly, the recourse to intermediary texts can be quite useful for translators. Indeed, as Seleskovitch & Lederer (1989: 178) pertinently point out, if the first-hand translation is of good quality, providing a clear and coherent interpretation of the ultimate source text, it can make the second translator's task much easier. Although the results of the above-mentioned study concern relay interpreting, they can be easily extrapolated to the translation of literary texts.

Finally, ITr can be profitable for publishers. On the one hand, as already mentioned, translating from central languages tends to be less costly than translating from peripheral languages, thus offering the publishers an opportunity to economize on translation expenses. On the other hand, ITr can be used as a risk-management strategy: filtered through the central and more prestigious cultures, ITr may better conform to tastes in the ultimate target community. In the same vein, subsequent direct retranslations may be frowned upon because they may not meet the expectations of the readership, used to previous indirect versions of the same work.

3 Final remarks and outlook

On the basis of the above, it seems safe to conclude that very few of the common assumptions about ITr are supported by research. It is therefore evident that we need much more empirically-based systematic studies to provide a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of ITr. The following is just a sample of research areas in need of development.

Terminological level

- a. Are terms «indirect», «mediated», «intermediate», «relay», «second-hand» translation synonyms? What are their connotations in English? Are these terms easily translatable to other languages? Which term should we use?
- b. Which of these terms is most commonly used and why? Has there been any change in their use over time?

- c. How do languages other than English refer to the phenomenon being studied here? Could English benefit from these terms?

Conceptual level

- a. How does indirectness correlate with various translation types (adaptation; back-translation; interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic translation; non-translation; pseudo-translation, re-translation; revision; self-translation)?
- b. How can we benefit from revisiting concepts such as translation norms, policy, universals, and units through indirectness?

Methodological level

- a. What questions tend to guide research on ITr?
- b. How can (in)directness be verified; i.e., how can it be established whether a translation is direct or indirect? Which research tools/methods are most suitable/reliable? What are their pros and cons?
- c. How can various degrees of indirectness be verified; i.e., how can one distinguish whether an ITr is secondary (i.e., using one mediating text/language that is itself a direct translation) or tertiary (i.e., using a mediating text that is itself an ITr)? Is there any way of distinguishing between the latter and eclectic translation (i.e., a translation that presupposes the alternate or simultaneous use of several mediating texts, often in different mediating languages)?
- d. How can the most plausible mediating languages(s)/text(s) be identified?
- e. How can we benefit from research models used for relay interpreting, audiovisual translation, etc.? How can we benefit from research models employed in other disciplines (e.g., literary criticism)?

Empirical data

- a. What are the main tendencies in indirect literary translation?

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- b. What patterns and regularities should be formulated as hypotheses orienting the study of ITr?
- c. How does indirectness correlate with such variables as author profile, translator profile, publisher profile, target text literary genre, the occurrence of the label '(in)direct', date of publications, etc.? What other variables are relevant for the study of indirect interliterary transfers?
- d. What is the role of ITr in the consecration of languages, cultures, genres and authors?
- e. Is the patterning for indirect literary translation different from non-literary (technical, scientific) translation, audiovisual translation, etc.?

Obviously, the above list of queries is far from exhaustive and is only meant to serve as a springboard for new ideas. However, I do believe that it points in the right direction. Questions abound; hopefully the present volume – and future research – will provide some answers.

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Annex: Definitions of ITr (and related terms) referred to in the present paper (in alphabetic order, according to author)

<i>Term</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Definition</i>
retraduction / re-translation retraduction / re- translation	BAUER (1999: 19)	«les retraductions à partir d'une langue tierce»; «translations by means of intermediate languages»
indirect translation	DOLLERUP (2000: 10)	«situations where two parties must communicate by means of a third intermediary realization which has no legitimate audience»
indirect translation	DOLLERUP (2009: 2)	«[...] a process that comprises an intermediate translation and therefore involves three languages. The intervening translation does not cater for a genuine audience and exists only in order to transfer a message from one language to another. [...] The characteristics of an indirect translation are that – all senders, mediators and recipients know that the intermediate translation is merely a stage in the communication between the parties directly interested: the senders and the recipients;– therefore the intermediate translation is not directed towards an 'authentic audience'»

<i>Term</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Definition</i>
relay translation	DOLLERUP (2000: 19)	«a mediation from source to target language in which the translational product has been realised in another language than that of the original; the defining feature is that the intermediary translation has an audience, that is consumers, of its own»
indirect translation	FRANK (2004: 806)	«the use of translations into a third language by literary translators»
retraduction	GAMBIER (1994: 413)	«la retraduction serait une nouvelle traduction, dans une même langue, d'un texte déjà traduit, en entier ou en partie» [...]; «traduction d'une text lui-même traduit d'une autre langue': la retraduction serait donc l'étape ultime de d'un travail réalisé grâce à un intermédiaire, à un texte-pivot. Cette deuxième traduction — ou <i>traduction de traduction</i> — n'est par rare» [emphasis in the original]
retranslation	GAMBIER (2003: 49)	«retranslation' is translating a text, partly or in its entirety, into a language in which one or more previously translated versions existed»; «[...] to this first meaning of retranslation (<i>Webster Universal Dictionary</i> 1970; <i>The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary</i> 1971) we can add a second one consisting in the translation of a translated text (<i>Longman/Webster English College Dictionary</i> 1984). [...] type of retranlations – where the new translation draws upon an intermediary text as a source text»

What do (we think) we know about indirectness in literary translation?

<i>Term</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Definition</i>
indirect translation	GAMBIER (2003: 57)	«indirect translation of literary works, based on a translated version of the original text»
traducción indirecta	GÓRSKA (2013: 5)	«un proceso de traducción que incluye las tres lenguas (y culturas), en vez de dos como es el caso de una traducción directa»
indirect translation	KITTEL & FRANK (1991: 3)	«any translation based on a source (or sources) which is itself a translation into a language other than the language of the original, or the target language»
indirect translation	LANDERS (2001: 130)	«translation into Language C based on a translation into Language B of a source text in Language A»
indirect translation / mediated translation	MONAKO GLOSSARY (1997)	«translation done via an intermediary translation in a third language, not directly from the original»
tradução indirecta	PIĘTA (2013: 40)	«uma tradução em língua diferente da do TP (primário) e do TM, feita a partir de um TM que constitui uma tradução orientada para a publicação»
indirect translation	PYM (2011: 80)	«historical process of translation from an intermediary version»
relay translation	RINGMAR (2012: 141)	«a chain of (at least) three texts, ending with a translation made from another translation: (original) ST > intermediate text (IT) > (end) TT»

<i>Term</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Definition</i>
indirect (intermediate / mediated / second-hand) translation / retranslation	SHUTTLEWORTH & COWIE (1997: 76)	«a term used to denote the procedure whereby a text is not translated directly from an original ST, but via an intermediate translation in another language»
indirect (intermediate / mediated / second-hand) translation	SIN-WAI (2004: 104)	«translation process in which the translator does not translate directly from the original, but indirectly from a translated version of the original [...] Same as 'intermediate translation', 'mediated translation' or 'second-hand translation'»
indirect translation	ŠPIRK (2011: 45)	«translations not made directly with recourse to the original, but by means of a mediating text»
indirect translation	ŠPIRK (2011: 51)	«indirect translation may be defined as a target text for which the source text was not the 'original' (the 'manuscript') written by the original author, but some other version(s) of the text (e.g. an unauthorised edition in the source language, a translation, intralingual, interlingual or otherwise)»
relay translation	ST. ANDRÉ (2009: 230)	«translation of a translated text (either spoken or written) into a third language»
indirect (mediated / intermediate) translation)	TOURY (1995: 58; 2012: 82)	«translating from languages other than the ultimate source language»