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Descriptive Translation Studies of Audiovisual Translation: 21st-century Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

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This paper aims to identify theoretical and methodological issues, challenges and opportunities posed by the specific nature of research on audiovisual translation (AVT) developed within the framework of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) based on a selective overview of such research in the 21st century. For this purpose, it offers a brief presentation of the overarching principles of DTS; a selective overview of research on AVT in the 21st century, considering the main achievements and challenges involved in such research; and a discussion of some theoretical and methodological issues, challenges and opportunities faced by Descriptive Audiovisual Translation Studies.

Keywords: Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), audiovisual translation (AVT), descriptive approach, translation research methodology, Translation Studies Bibliography

1. Introduction

This paper intends to present a panorama of research on audiovisual translation (AVT) developed within the framework of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) during the 21st century. It thereby seeks to reflect upon theoretical and methodological issues posed by the specific nature of such research on the vast and rapidly growing gamut of audiovisual products resorting to translation.

The first part of this paper briefly summarizes the main tenets of DTS; the second part offers a selective overview of research on AVT during the 21st century; the third part discusses selected problems and some prospects in descriptive AVT studies.

2. Basic principles of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS)

DTS may be defined as a descriptive, empirical, interdisciplinary, and target-oriented approach to the study of translation, focusing especially on the role of translation in cultural history. Here is a selective presentation of the main principles of DTS:

- a) The choice of the term '**studies**' instead of 'science' is a means of explicitly affiliating the discipline to the Humanities (Holmes 1988/2000).
- b) **Translation** is defined by Toury (1995/2012) as any text presented and functioning as a translation in a target context. This concept is therefore (un)defined as assumed translation, which also includes e.g. pseudo-translations (non-translated texts presented and received as translations). This object is further amplified to encompass translation as product (the translated text), as process (translating) and function (role and value) within its context, which also brings metatexts to the attention of research (paratexts, reviews and critiques, guidelines and specifications, codes of conduct and good practice). The object additionally encompasses all contextual variables that may have a bearing upon translation.

- c) For a '**contextual**' study of translation, DTS tends to focus on the relations between textual and contextual variables, by resorting to concepts such as (poly)system, norms, laws or patronage; for example, the descriptive concept of the translational relationship between source and target text is contextually-motivated instead of speculatively and prescriptively stated a-priori. Actual translation relationships result from culture-specific **translation norms**, i.e. contextually valued models for performing the social role of translator. Identifying them becomes instrumental to revealing a given sociocultural and historical community's own self-definition within wider intercultural international (power) relations (as revealed e.g. by varying degrees of tolerance to interference) (Toury 1995/2012).
- d) In reaction to previous source-orientedness, the '**target-oriented**' approach of DTS means a shift of main focus to both the target text and context, which, however, does not exclude the source culture and text or the wider international context as essential to understanding translation in context (Toury 1995/2012).
- e) Only an '**interdisciplinary**' approach can encompass such a complex object that beyond a merely linguistic nature is also considered in its historical, cultural, social, economic, political and ideological nature (Even-Zohar 1990).
- f) '**Descriptive**' studies undertake to diagnose the status quo of translation in a given time (or time-frame) and space, and they have developed historically in explicit opposition to extant mainly prescriptive, speculative, evaluative approaches to translation, as well as to the predominance of applied studies (Toury 1995/2012).
- g) '**Empirical**' studies aim mainly to describe and understand but also to explain and predict, by formulating general principles, tendencies and regularities. Developing relevant methodologies, identifying pertinent profile and contextual variables, formulating and testing hypotheses and devising operative categories and classifications are also paramount endeavors (Chesterman 2001).

These basic principles were mainly formulated with literary translation in mind. However their application to research on other text types and translation modalities has been widely performed.¹ Adopting them in research on AVT appears both to offer opportunities and to raise issues deserving further attention.

3. DTS Research on AVT: a selective overview

Let us now consider a selective overview of research on AVT in the 21st century, in order to reflect upon the main achievements and challenges of such research but not without first considering the growing complexity of AVT.

3.1 The growing complexity of AVT

AVT, also referred to as ‘media’ or ‘multimedia translation’ ‘cinema/film/screen translation’, ‘versioning’ or ‘multidimensional translation,’ may be considered a complex and diversified field for several reasons (see Gambier 2013, 46). Firstly, the complex nature of the audiovisual text needs stressing. It results not only from the integration of four main constituents – audio-verbal signs (words heard), visual-verbal signs (words read on screen), audio-nonverbal signs (sounds heard, including music and special sound effects), and visual-nonverbal signs (photographic and cinematic units, sequence of scenes, rhythm of image succession, use of camera, light and colour) (Zabalbeascoa 2008; Gambier 2013) – but also from a variable contribution of each constituent to any specific AV text and even text-part. Secondly, the translated audiovisual text often encompasses all (or most) of the source AV text components to which the target text is also added, thus forming a further complexified network deserving further study. Thirdly, audiovisual communication encompasses an ever-evolving range of audiovisual text-types and genres,

¹ See also Assis Rosa (2010) and Ben-Ari (2013).

as well as audiovisual media and platforms created by swift technological change. Fourthly, technological innovation and progress force a constant catching-up-mode upon the AVT industry, stimulating the invention of more flexible, less time-consuming and expensive AVT modalities (often combining human and machine translation) or the convergence of already existing modalities, thus creating newly complex hybrid forms of AVT.² Additional factors causing the innovation of AVT modes are the evolution of audience profiles (related to broadcasting vs. narrowcasting for minority sensory impaired groups), strong demands within multilingual societies (e.g. bilingual subtitling in Macau, Belgium or Finland, or intralinguistic remakes using different national varieties), or a growing demand for access to information on the hour (requiring live subtitling, simultaneous interpreting or translation) (Gambier 2004; Bassnett 2015, 125 ff.). Finally, a communicatively complex context also has to be (re)defined for the purpose of performing AVT studies.

3.2 DTS research on AVT?

The *Translation Studies Bibliography - TSB* was searched in April 2014 for the purpose of drawing a brief (if rough) panorama of main trends evidenced by (descriptive) research on AVT since 2000 (Gambier and van Doorslaer 2003-2010).³

With the purpose of identifying the possible relevance of DTS within recent publications in general, keywords and abstracts were first queried on ‘**DTS**’ and ‘**descriptive**’. The searches for ‘Descriptive Translation Studies’ or ‘DTS’ returned 70 hits in keywords and 24 in abstracts; those for ‘descriptive’ returned

² For a recent take on AVT modalities/modes see Gambier (2013).

³ This choice was only determined by availability at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon, FLUL. BITRA has very similar figures, only ‘norm’ and ‘system’ rank higher in abstracts (unfortunately, it does not allow for a comparable keyword search). The search of *TSB* took place between 11.04.2015 and 24.04.2015.

177 hits in keywords and 410 hits in abstracts. So, even if TSB keywords and abstracts do not appear to favor studies explicitly following the main tenets of DTS, they still stress the descriptive (vs. prescriptive) purpose of a high number of studies published since 2000. This may either point towards a lessening investment and appeal of research within DTS, or to such a strong tacitly accepted relevance of descriptive approaches, that this no longer requires explicit mention.

Similar queries for the term ‘audiovisual’ returned 577 hits in keywords and 433 hits in abstracts; ‘multimedia’ returned 93 and 96 hits.⁴ This may confirm suggestions that ‘audiovisual translation’ has gained ground against former alternatives (such as film, screen or multimedia translation) (see Gambier 2013, 46). Combining two terms in one complex search returned 22 hits for both ‘**audiovisual**’ and ‘**descriptive**’ in abstracts (7 in keywords); the search for ‘multimedia’ and ‘descriptive’ returned 2 hits in abstracts (1 in keywords) – these were studies on illustrations in printed advertisement or scientific-technical texts or on the contribution of DTS for AVT (for more on Pym 2001, see below). The only hit for the combined search of ‘**audiovisual**’ and ‘**DTS**’ or ‘descriptive’ was another article on the relevance of DTS for AVT (for more on Díaz-Cintas 2004, see below).

Regarding AVT modalities, the main foci revealed by this survey have proven to be: subtitling (570/553 hits in abstracts/keywords), localization (320/280), and dubbing (313/292), closely followed by sign language interpreting (165/237). At a distance come audiodescription (11/99), voice-over (33/45), surtitling (33/40), SDH (26/0), fansubbing

⁴ Regarding the choice of “audiovisual” or “multimedia” translation, this paper defines them as partly overlapping, following Gambier (2013, 46). AVT “brought to the forefront the multisemiotic dimension of all broadcast programmes (TV, cinema, radio, DVD)”; multimedia translation “refers explicitly to the multitude of media and channels now used in global and local communication for different purposes (information, entertainment, education, advertising, etc.)”; the two do not coincide entirely since multimedia translation also includes e.g. the translation of comics (multimedia, multimodal but not audiovisual).

(13/17), and fandubbing (1/17). Searches for comparative studies of ‘subtitling’ and ‘dubbing’ (147/125) or ‘humor’ in ‘AVT’ (though less so: 0/42 hits), often mentioned as a repetitive focus of AVT research, as well as ‘accessibility’ (210/71) also rank high, which may be tentatively interpreted as indicative of the main 21st-century research trends in AVT.

Among the 22 descriptive studies of AVT, six are books (monographs or edited volumes) devoted to dubbing in regional television, motion picture translation in several countries, dubbing, subtitling and voice-over in screen translating, translation norms for humor, and subtitling and dubbing for TV. Among them, only two explicitly present a DTS purpose: the formulation of translation norms for the AVT of humor on TV, or the study of the function of dubbing in minority language TV. The remaining studies are either just loosely presented as describing a given AVT corpus or problem (predominantly humor) or appear to have an applied purpose – associated with motion picture translation and its implementation in foreign language classes, or with more practice oriented purposes (e.g. a handbook for screen translation). The remaining 16 papers focus on specific modalities, mainly subtitling and dubbing (also offering comparative studies), but also audiodescription (and audio-narration) or AVT in general; they concentrate mainly on cinema/film and television, but they also examine museums, theatre and illustrations in printed material; seven are presented as studies of AVT norms (also including the concepts of strategies, methods, techniques, and constraints) and four explicitly mention their affiliation to DTS.

This brief survey concluded with a set of searches aimed at identifying the use of terms closely related to the conceptual framework of DTS (system, norm, law, universal, patronage, target) and the approach (empirical, descriptive, interdisciplinary) in studies published on AVT. The following table summarizes the number of hits for each term in abstracts and keywords:

Hits in abstracts	Term	Hits in keywords
13	system	7
8	norm	19
3	law	0
11	universal	0
1	patronage	0
42	context	3
66	target	17
20	empirical	11
23	descriptive	7
14	interdisciplinary	0

Table 1: TSB searches for terms related to DTS concepts and approach

DTS concepts apparently used more frequently are: target (66/17), context (42/3), norm (8/19), system (13/7), and law (3/0), with only one hit for patronage (1/0). The terms related to the DTS approach that are more often used are descriptive (23/7), empirical (20/11) and interdisciplinary (14/0). However, the term descriptive is used rather loosely for a study descriptive of an AVT corpus or of the solutions offered to a particular problem (humor) in an AVT corpus, rather than explicitly presenting a study applying a DTS target-oriented approach to translation regularities, motivations and consequences. The relative importance of these hits in a database holding over 24 500 entries (April 2014) is residual, which is indicative of the apparently still only incipient application of DTS to AVT (see below).

4. DTS research on AVT: issues, challenges and opportunities

This search of TSB identified two papers specifically devoted to discussing the relevance of DTS for research on audiovisual and multimedia translation: Anthony Pym's 2001 paper "Four remarks on translation research and multimedia" as well as Jorge Díaz-Cintas 2004 article "In search of a theoretical framework for the study of audiovisual translation".

4.1 Discussing the relevance of DTS on AVT

Pym (2001) addresses challenges to descriptivism posed by research in multimedia, or transcultural media, a term the author would rather use.⁶ Focusing on risks of complex specialized research and offering constructive criticism, it does not shy away from suggesting some solutions too. In brief the paper stresses: the risk of intellectual fragmentation resulting from the accumulation of isolated complex descriptions; the need for (a higher degree of) critical involvement by researchers, and the related need to address “socially lived problems in need of solution” (Pym 2001, 276); the problem of a myopic concentration on target-culture conditioning and the need to encompass “wide transcultural movements, the stuff of ideologies and market” (Pym 2001, 277); the imperative of redefining concepts such as culture (or system), sender and receiver, as well as the location of agents and determining factors of media translation (practitioners and researchers); the risk of strategic power agendas camouflaged behind “lab-coated” complex research and the need to acknowledge them, and unveil power-brokers and real stakeholders in the complex multimedia communication practitioner/research community (Pym 2001, 276). In summary, the paper stresses the risks of the accumulation of fragmentary knowledge produced by apparently aseptic descriptive studies, instead of the promised generalizations and wider context-oriented studies; and suggests the solution is to produce more critically involved and important research on socially relevant or problematic issues, which can make a difference.

Jorge Díaz-Cintas (2004) offers an analysis of the potential validity of the main conceptual framework of DTS for research on AVT. Among the main issues, the paper claims the

⁶ On this preference, see Pym (2001, 280-282), where the author explains his understanding of the complexity of multimedia translation as an intercultural field, also because of the multiple possibilities created by technology, e.g. allowing the choice of the sound channel to watch different dubbed versions of a programme.

concepts offered by DTS initially referred almost exclusively to literary translation and need adapting, although it adds that the majority of concepts are operative in AVT research, as a set of heuristic tools opening up new possibilities for research. It stresses the need to reformulate the polysystemic concepts of primary (innovative and central) and secondary (conservative and peripheral) practices, so as to make them applicable to AVT where counterexamples allegedly abound.⁷ It further considers the concept of initial norm (adequacy and acceptability) insufficient to deal with AVT because it claims: “the value of the image tends to take precedence over the word” (Díaz-Cintas 2008, 26).⁸ The stress upon the study of the historical variability of translation norms is also said to pose the risk of designing overambitious descriptive projects aimed at describing AVT corpora that may prove too big due to a high number of texts or the consideration of several decades.

In general, however, this paper mainly identifies opportunities for research in AVT as a result of the application of DTS, stating it offers a remarkably operative conceptual framework to move beyond the consideration of the merely linguistic profile of AVT so as to also encompass an extensive network of contextual features. It stresses the relevance of three concepts: polysystem, translation norm and patronage. First, the concept of polysystem applied to AVT is highlighted as particularly operative and promising, by drawing attention to the study of the translated AV system as part of the wider target AV system (encompassing both high and low culture), and enabling the consideration of the

⁷ The association of innovative to central and conservative to peripheral systems criticized by Díaz-Cintas (2004, 23) is only one of the possibilities mentioned by Even-Zohar (see 1990, 22, 46), who states this association “depends on the specific constellation of the polysystem under study”.

⁸ This requires further clarification involving, e.g., enquiring for whom the image takes precedence over the word (the director, the AVT translator considering the AV source text, the viewer watching the translated AV target text, etc.). Especially when one considers the growing number of subtitled programmes by subtitlers who only have access to the word (the template), as presupposed by the first recommendation in the Code of Good Subtitling Practice (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998), or the currently growing use of software combinations such as discourse recognition and machine translation for SDH, this statement appears too vague.

diversity of media and genres in the field of AVT as well as the consideration of further dimensions beyond the merely linguistic one. It thereby opens up the field to also comprehend sociocultural, and professional factors, power struggles between systems and modalities, national practices and preferences regarding AVT, or comparative studies on different systems (e.g. the AVT and literary translation systems). Second, the DTS concept of norms (preliminary and operational) is considered particularly useful to direct research projects on AVT, with the purpose of mapping the historical variability of AVT practice and understanding its meaning within its historical context, since it also enables the unveiling of the intervention of several agents specific to AVT (laboratories, production and distribution companies, dubbing actors and directors, technicians, adaptors, etc.). Finally, the paper also highlights the added validity of the concept of patronage to focus on extra-linguistic dimensions relevant to AVT, enabling contextual studies aimed at describing the influence e.g. of censorship and legislation, governmental authorities, TV channels and laboratories, educational institutions, production and distribution companies, or audience preferences.

4.2 Main challenges to the successful application of DTS to AVT

Besides the thought-provoking issues and opportunities mentioned by these two papers, the following main challenges to the successful application of DTS approaches to research on AVT were also considered worth stressing. First and foremost, the **semiotic complexity of the audiovisual text** poses significant difficulties to a systematic descriptive empirical approach. As often stated, DTS developed mainly with literary translation in mind and consequently its conceptual framework was designed for a different object and in some cases requires adapting. Adaptation is underway⁹ and has already opened up new

⁹ For a reflection on the AV text, see Delabastita (1989), Zabalbeascoa (2008), Gambier (2013).

opportunities for research. Let us not forget that the first worth mentioning is the fact that DTS has brought (formerly low-brow) AVT to the attention of academic research, which (not without considerable resistance) was lead to consider first translation, then literary translation, then also the whole gamut of AVT worthy of its attention. On the other hand, this main conceptual framework was created by “a structuralist movement in comparative literature” (Pym 2001, 277), which will probably need further adaptation when other disciplines, research questions and purposes are brought to tackle AVT.

The main difficulties posed by the semiotic complexity of audiovisual texts may be interpreted in terms of three main issues. Firstly, from the point of view of the researcher, far from simply stressing the multimedia and multimodal nature of the AV source text without further consideration, it appears vital to identify the different roles played by the various modes and signs in the production of meaning (by viewers and translators) and in translation decisions, as currently carried out by research on reception. Specific AV texts or text-parts may be more or less verbal or nonverbal, more or less audio or visual, allowing for different combinations, turning multimodality into a matter of degree and bringing about the need to map each text or even text-part along at least these two continua (Zabalbeascoa 2008, 25-29) and to continue studies on reception. Though defying generalization, this stresses the need to further consider predominant proportions for different media or genres, and different cultural and historical contexts. Further studies of translation decisions are also needed to identify the actual role played by (non-)verbal visual/audio components in AVT products and processes. Mapping classification units for the purposes of analysis and devising operative classifications for the description of AV textual regularities is far from settled. Generally, the criticism of a strong verbal bias or linguistic hypertrophy is still frequent. In response to it, some stress the need to analyze each frame in terms of all the semiotic modes involved. Others state the imperative of necessarily adapting and simplifying multimodal transcription (Taylor 2003; Baldry and

Thibault 2006). Second, from the point of view of the professional, the consideration of non-verbal components is undeniably tantamount to create (as much as possible) a synchronous target text (be it subtitled, dubbed, voiced-over or interpreted). It is however still not clear how far the AV translator focuses on translating the verbal component (oral and written text), only resorting to contextual non-verbal components (both audio and visual) of discursive interaction as ancillary for the purpose of interpreting the verbal component of discourse and of translating not textual meaning but contextual sense, current research on reception may prove helpful. Last, the synchronous target text produced by the AV translator is only one (additional) constituent of the final product aired: the translated audiovisual text. Research still has to move beyond the comparative analysis of source and target texts, beyond their consideration within a target or international context in order to tackle this further complexity of the translated audiovisual text. It corresponds to a new texture of verbal and non-verbal, audio and visual, source and target components, deserving further attention by both practitioners and researchers. Perhaps also due to the higher complexity it exhibits, this hybrid AV translated text has seldom received attention as a new multi-semiotic network, and this attention needs to be aimed at both its production and reception.

The DTS principle of refocusing the studies on AVT mainly upon the target **context** to produce “broadly systemic target-based descriptions” (Pym 2001, 276) has produced considerable knowledge on the hitherto vastly unknown field of AVT and its relevance for contemporary cultures. Besides the obvious benefits to the understanding of motivations and consequences in a field strongly marked by international agents, considering a wider international context also raises some issues. It is clearly beneficial for the study of AVT to consider national audiovisual polysystems encompassing both translated and non-translated systems, and perform comparative studies. Additional focus on the contextual influence by agents involved in the production of a translated audiovisual product, genre,

or translation modality brings further light to a type of translation that is very clearly dependent upon team work, perhaps even more so than any other text type. However, the empirical study of contextual variables also poses the additional problem of clearly earmarking those particularly relevant for the descriptive study of regularities in AVT.

The need to move beyond case studies and atomistic descriptions in order to identify regularities (universals, laws, norms, strategies/procedures, translation units) brings about the additional difficulty in creating, accessing and analyzing **multimedia corpora**. The need to develop AVT corpora (considering different media, language pairs, AVT modalities, and corpus types – monolingual, multilingual, multi-semiotic, parallel, comparable corpora-, etc.) as well as specific tools for qualitative and quantitative analysis, and to make them available to the community of researchers are problems that have to be solved in order to achieve the purpose of an encompassing, systemic description of translational regularities in AVT. The descriptive analysis of wider corpora and their contexts is further complicated not only by the need for more effective hardware and software allowing for a semi-automatic qualitative and quantitative analysis but mostly still by thorny issues related to the copyrighting of audiovisual materials preventing the creation of AVT corpora for systemic descriptive research purposes, and the dissemination of such research.¹⁰ Given the diversity, complexity and hybridity of the object, the possibility of developing an encompassing descriptive approach and the need to consider methodological and theoretical specificities related to medium, modality and contextual features of AVT pose a further difficulty to reconcile. Last, despite the availability of alternative AV platforms, the still predominant use of print to present and disseminate descriptive studies of AVT (papers, monographs, theses) imposes a very serious constraint to research.

¹⁰ An AVT researcher faces: difficulties in accessing AVT products, strict copyright limiting the length of quotations allowed, and the impossibility to create free online corpora for a research group or the wider AVT research community.

The currently **very intricate landscape of audiovisual and multimedia communication** also brings further complexity to context-oriented research on this field, not only because “technology gives us more possibilities than those included in the field of research” (Pym 2001: 280) but also because it becomes more difficult to classify audiovisual and multimedia communication in terms of well-known but perhaps too simple communication models, e.g., identifying sending and receiving national systems appears far from straightforward with international media.¹¹ This may call for a redefinition of culture or system and the adaptation of existing models or the development of operative communicative models applicable to the contemporary complex and growingly hybrid mediascape.

The principle of **interdisciplinarity** of DTS raises additional problems because encompassing approaches to the study of a polysystem are best performed by team research projects. However, on one hand, belonging to the academic world is still marked by gatekeeping practices associated with the mandatory presentation of individual considerably time-restricted projects (M.A., doctoral and post-doctoral theses); in some cases, academic evaluation is diffident of joint or collaborative publications; additionally, interdisciplinary approaches are seldom considered by the list of disciplines for the submission of a research project; and last, it appears difficult for such projects to be duly assessed by mainly single-discipline-oriented evaluation panels for the purpose of obtaining academic degrees, achieving career advancement or funding. This is applicable to Translation Studies in general, whose evaluation has been setback by its interdisciplinary nature because its assessment is usually submitted to (inter)national panels of Linguistics or Literary Studies; but this appears to be even more detrimental for AVT studies and projects that so often state their wish to go beyond merely linguistic

¹¹ Pym (2001, 278) mentions foreign language programs translated into German and transmitted by German broadcasters via satellite to European countries.

approaches or with difficulty are awarded an academic status similar to literary translation. Additionally, the initial idea of anchoring DTS within the Humanities appears to be reductive when interdisciplinary research projects are increasingly demanding e.g. in terms of computing, computer sciences, producing or adapting software needed for the storage, compilation, analysis and (semi-)automatic classification and tagging of growing multilingual and multisemiotic corpora, or also in terms of statistics, given the advantage of statistical analysis enabling the identification of relevant regularities, to name but a couple of examples.

Within the current context of growing difficulty of access to funding for research projects and also considering the growing encroachment of a utilitarian scientific discourse, descriptive research on AVT has another challenge to address: the question of financing pure or fundamental research (descriptive and theoretical vs. applied studies). Given the current importance attributed to the immediate social relevance of research, it seems difficult to move beyond the already predominantly applied nature of collective efforts to define standards, codes of good practices regarding specific AVT modalities or more or less individual efforts to build better translator training programs and units for AVT modalities. Prescriptive and applied studies of socially relevant or problematic issues are persistently called for (see Pym 2001, 276). Fundamental systemic descriptive and empirical research on AVT as product, process and function may be clearly instrumentalized in the medium or long term for the applied purpose of producing better AVT practice or training better AVT translators. Research is producing an increasingly informative and thorough diagnosis of how AVT works in national and international contexts. It is formulating and testing more translation norms for several AV text types, genres, media, platforms and AVT modalities for different cultures. As this information is made available and applied, both the translation practice and training can become more functional, efficient and effective. But fundamental or pure descriptive research should still

be valued per se, irrespective of the (manifold and perhaps very promising) applied purposes it may eventually be used to attain.

5. Towards a conclusion

The current global atmosphere appears dominated by a general blogospheric overvaluation and concomitant proliferation of speculative, subjectively opinionated and very critical – even if sometimes not particularly informed (e.g. by empirically based proof) if not downright biased — text production. In the more restricted academic atmosphere, the pendulum appears to be swaying in the direction of committed applied approaches, and projects are strongly limited by scarcity and the consequent almost exclusive funding of immediately socially relevant, and therefore mainly applied/prescriptive research projects on socially problematic issues. Against this background, DTS seems to have lost some of its appeal, even if its main conceptual framework appears to have been only barely applied to the expanding field of AVT. It appears redundant to state that before suggesting relevant, important and lasting changes to a given system, one has to first understand (and be able to explain and predict) how it functions or that a monopoly or strong predominance of applied research was what initially drew several researchers to place their bets on DTS. The potentialities and limitations of research on AVT following a descriptive approach, as briefly sketched by this paper, are mainly to be considered open questions in an ongoing discussion on the search for further relevant paths for empirical, descriptive context-oriented fundamental research on AVT.

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