

The Changing Position of “the Translator” in Research and in Practice

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Abstract

In this paper I examine the position occupied by “the translator” in translation theory and practice. A synthesis of some general trends in translation theory is summed up before taking a closer look at the translator’s position in practice. Toury (1984) criticised translation theory for assigning the translator a rather parasitic position while intuitively it would seem to make more sense to assume him/her to occupy a rather central role in translation. Since then the translator has received more attention in translation studies. Functional translation theory puts a great deal of emphasis on the translator as the central decision-maker. Empirical studies into the translation process focus on the translator as the processor and producer of texts. Also, research on the sociology of translation concentrates on various aspects of translators’ work, thus highlighting their status. Meanwhile, the language industry, one of the largest employers of translators today, seems to be tempted to push the translator to the margins. Similar developments seem to affect the field of audio-visual translation as well. I will discuss these opposite trends and developments as well as their potential effects. The role of translation researchers and educators in analysing, reporting and influencing these developments will also be touched upon. Finally, more emphasis on translation political research is recommended.