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Andrew Chesterman. (2017) *Reflections on Translation Theory: Selected papers 1993-2014*. [Benjamins Translation Library 132]. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. x + 396 pp.

The title of this book, *Reflections on Translation Theory*, encapsulates the sort of understatement that characterises much of Andrew Chesterman's work. As a title, it makes no wild claims and suggests nothing more than a few thoughts, some questions that need to be addressed. Yet Chesterman's constant, gentle probing, as evidenced in this book, really unsettles much of what we take for granted in translation studies, often in a constructive manner. Chesterman has written about descriptive and prescriptive models of translation scholarship, causality and explanation, norms, similarity and difference, hypotheses, 'universals', the sociological turn and translation ethics (as represented the papers in sections II-IX of this book). Taken together, that is a significant contribution to translation theory across many of the key areas that continue to be of importance to scholars and students. The first section of the book also shows Chesterman grappling with notions of what translation studies should be, most famously in the 'Shared ground in Translation Studies' article he cowrote with Rosemary Arrojo (first published in 2000 and included here, 17-24).

It is hard to imagine that anyone working in the field of translation studies is unfamiliar with Chesterman's work, given that he has contributed in so many areas. Chesterman does not appear to belong to any one school or tendency. His work discusses and draws from a range of translation theories, often critically, but, and this is possibly why he is so interesting as a theorist, with an openness to other points of view that allows for dialogue about ideas. Chesterman situates himself as a descriptive theorist (x), and his engagement with norms and with empirical data supports that, but he is also interested in prescriptive theories and more functionalist approaches. Chesterman's engagement with any theory tends to be questioning, asking how it works and whether or not it can be tested against the data.

Indeed, his contribution to translation studies often relies on theories of epistemology and scientific thinking (e.g. Karl Popper's work). There is a quiet seriousness to this line of thinking that keeps asking 'can you test that?', ultimately asking what a theory of translation should be doing: should it be producing testable hypotheses? (from the evidence in this book, Chesterman seems to think so). What else does it do? Chesterman explores these ideas in the paper 'What constitutes "progress" in Translation Studies?' (25-33) and throughout the book.

Chesterman's discussion of prescriptivism begins with the idea that translation theory should be of some use for translators (Paper 3: 45). He posits that this requires a strong descriptive element, as only through describing what translators actually do is it possible to explain what they should do: 'it is the norms that prescribe, not the scholar' (46). This position feels almost self-evident: of course, translators should benefit in some way from the study of translation and translations, and describing norms of practice is one way in which that might be directly relevant to them. Yet translation studies does not exist solely to describe norms and nor does it exist solely for the benefit of translators – other stakeholders might include readers/users of translations, institutions, publishers, writers and so on. Chesterman is aware of the differing positions of translation scholars, who themselves may come from different disciplines and that disciplinarity is likely to affect what sorts of research questions they are going to be asking. A scholar with training in linguistics is going to focus on quite different issues from a scholar trained in cultural studies or comparative literature.

Chesterman addresses such diversity in papers like 'Towards consilience?' (Paper 4: 35-42), 'On the idea of a theory' (Paper 1: 3-16) and 'Shared ground in Translation Studies' (Paper 2: 17-24). These continual reflections on what translation studies can (and should) be often take the form of methodological questioning: what sorts of things should translation scholars be describing? This leads into Chesterman's work on causality and hypotheses, which are presented as two separate sections here (Section III, 95-164; Section VI, 223-250)

but which are interconnected. Many of the hypotheses one might generate about translation relate to causal relationships: by translating in this way, such and such a result should follow. While this might not seem all that interesting at first glance, it offers the possibility of testing and falsifiability that scientific study is based around (66). Chesterman notes how ‘little such testing has actually been done’ (63) and it is clear that he favours such testing of ideas on actual data. There are many ways of doing this, some of which may be more acceptable in one discipline than others (e.g. scholars with a literary background will look for proof in ways that are different from how computational linguists will do so). The re-evaluation of skopos theory in this volume (Paper 6: 55-70) is a very good example of putting this into effect, and worth reading for the nuanced view it takes of skopos theory, which it ultimately argues is pedagogically useful (much translator training is based on it) but which is empirically weak as ‘it relies on an optimal set of working conditions with optimally competent translators’ (70), a situation which does not always take place in the real world of short deadlines and not always optimal translators (and even excellent translators can have a bad day or a headache).

Norms and similarities and differences form the foci of Sections IV and V (165-192 and 193-222). These topics are central to translation studies and Chesterman’s contribution in these papers continues to be relevant. As Paper 14, ‘Norms and evidence’ (185-192), demonstrates, Chesterman’s concern with how textual or discursive features can be evidenced is extended into this area, linking it with his work on causality and hypotheses. Chesterman’s discussion of ‘similarity’ (Paper 15: ‘On Similarity’, 195-201) is worth returning to for how it relates to the question of equivalence and the relationship of translations to their source texts. As is the case with many of the other papers collected here, Chesterman questions the basic foundations of much of the discourse on the topic, trying to find ways in which to develop better understanding of topics that are often approached from different epistemological

backgrounds. In ‘Problems with strategies’ (Paper 16, 201-213), for instance, he points out that the lack of clear terminology (with scholars using different terms for what might be the same procedures) makes it sometimes difficult to know what is being talked about and to develop coherent conceptual understandings of the processes of translation. While the papers in this volume were written at different times and published in different places, the questions of evidence, methodology and some sort of shared disciplinary discussion appear throughout most of them, making the collection feel unified around these topics. As such, what appear to be separate terms, such as ‘similarity’ and ‘causality,’ turn out to be mutually illuminating nodes in a network of ideas that Chesterman is exploring and which can lead to better and more rigorous thinking about translation.

Chesterman’s work on so-called universals (Chesterman is sceptical of the term; 251) also highlights the methodological and epistemological questioning seen elsewhere in this book. If translation studies is a ‘search for general tendencies’ (251) as Chesterman argues it should be (253), whether they are norms, laws or ‘universals’, then it must deal with what is meant by ‘general tendencies’ and how they can be demonstrated. In a paper that I think is somewhat typical of Chesterman’s work, he explores three different ways in which ‘universals’ can be generated: prescriptively, pejoratively (as negative aspects) and descriptively (using electronic corpora or otherwise). In each case, he highlights the advantages and disadvantages of each method, be they epistemological or practical (Paper 20: ‘Beyond the particular’; 253-268). I say this is typical of Chesterman’s work as it embodies his tendency not to exclude any one approach if it can offer something useful to the reader, while at the same time being critical of all approaches.

The move to a more human, rather than text-centred, translation studies is reflected in Chesterman’s discussion of sociological and ethical aspects. His ‘Proposal for a Hieronymic Oath’ (Paper 27: 347-362) is something of a classic in the work on the ethics of translation,

teasing out the fundamental values implied or discussed in the research that was current when it was written and suggesting ways of moving forward into a more virtue based ethics (353). Chesterman's work on the sociology of translation (collected in Section VIII) offers clear overviews of how it might be practised and what it might achieve, delving into different methodologies and the sorts of research questions it might ask.

Reading through this volume, I was struck by just how useful much of this material is, both for scholars and for students, and how helpful it is to have it collected in one place. The methodological reflections are important for thinking about what one might study in translation studies and the sorts of ways in which research might take place, as well as the sorts of questions that one might ask. Chesterman's balanced approach means that his writing seldom pushes the reader in any one direction, except, perhaps, that of coming up with testable hypotheses, but there is an argument that that is the sort of thing scholars should be doing anyway, and Chesterman does not rule out the possibility of interpretive hypotheses (see 'The status of interpretive hypotheses', Paper 18: 225-236), again showing tolerance for different methodologies and research goals. Chesterman's approach seems to be to review the issue at hand and then take a step back and ask how that might work in practice. Yet it is not anti-intellectual, just founded in an empiricist position that asks for evidence for statements and for testing of ideas against some sort of practice.

The papers in this volume tend to function at a theoretical or even meta-theoretical level, and while Chesterman is happy to introduce examples at key points to help explain ideas, there are seldom detailed engagements with specific texts (although papers 22 and 28, 'Kundera's sentence', 281-294, and 'An ethical decision', 363-368, are built around close readings of specific cases). This feels unbalanced to me: I would like to see Chesterman applying his ideas about how to investigate translations to actual translations. How would they fare when confronted with actual practice? What sorts of studies would they produce?

When Chesterman undertakes close readings and discusses specific texts, as he does in Paper 22 ‘Kundera’s sentence,’ he tends to be a nuanced reader who offers interesting insights based on his interpretation of the text. I think it would be good to see more of this side of him.

Reflections on Translation Theory ultimately demonstrates the importance of Chesterman’s work to translation theory. He offers an important, questioning voice in the discipline that does not allow anything to be taken for granted. His writing is refreshingly clear, but he is not afraid of complexity when it is necessary. While his style might be relatively straightforward and easy to read, the ideas he grapples with can be quite large and imposing. There is much to learn from reading Chesterman’s work, even if we disagree with it: even then, he points out ways in which we can develop our thinking about translation.

Reviewer’s address

Jonathan Evans

School of Languages and Area Studies

University of Portsmouth

Park Building

King Henry I Street

PORTSMOUTH

PO1 2DZ

UK

jonathan.evans@port.ac.uk