GUEST COLUMN

Editing Translation Studies: A Conversation with Lawrence Venuti

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Over the past dozen years, we have been coteaching a graduate seminar at Columbia University called Comparative Diasporas and Translation, a course we designed as an exploration of the theory and practice of translation from the perspective of comparative diaspora studies. The aim of the course is to consider the implications of diasporic histories for translation. How does the task of the translator change when she takes up multilingual literatures shaped by the uprooting and transformation intrinsic to the diasporic condition, forged in the precarity of migration and exile, lived in the shadow of empire? Does the translation of diasporic literatures—which so often reflect the impact of population movement and cross-cultural contact in their recourse to diglossia and bilingualism, to a widespread variety of pidgins, dialects, and creoles—demand particular poetic, typographical, and paratextual strategies (see Van Dyck 481–85)?

As translators ourselves, we work with different diasporas (the Greek and the African, respectively), and our plural title is meant to suggest that any study of diaspora is inherently a study of what the historian Earl Lewis calls "overlapping diasporas": that is, groups in movement are never "discrete or self-contained," but instead always "necessarily intersect, leading to exchange, assimilation, expropriation, coalition, or dissension," in a manner that plays out in the often exorbitant translingualism of diasporic literatures (Edwards 691). We aim to get our students—the majority of whom have no prior experience as translators—to think as practitioners, and to this end the final assignment for the seminar is a translation project;

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the last few weeks of the semester are devoted to a workshop in which we discuss each student's draft translation.

The syllabus as we have revised it each time we've offered the course includes some of the key scholarship in the fields of translation studies and diaspora studies and a number of case studies of literary works (by Kay Cicellis, Theresa Cha, Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, Amos Tutuola, Olga Broumas, Vassilis Alexakis, Patrick Chamoiseau, Harryette Mullen, and M. NourbeSe Philip, among others) that can be described as translational—that is, informed by a self-consciousness about the stakes and challenges of translation (see Hassan; Suga; Van Dyck 467). In striving to give our students an understanding of the field of translation studies, we decided the first time we offered the seminar to use *The Translation Studies Reader*, the influential anthology edited by Lawrence Venuti that provides an instructive introduction to the field. On a number of occasions, we have also invited Venuti to the class toward the beginning of the semester to speak about translation theory and practice.

The first edition of *The Translation Studies Reader* was published in 2000, and Venuti has substantially revised each subsequent edition (in 2004, 2012, and 2021) in response to the shifting state and current concerns of the field, with the result that the editions of the anthology can be read as something of a record of translation studies as it has evolved over the past quarter century. When we learned recently that Venuti has decided that the fifth edition of the *Reader* (scheduled to be published in 2026) will be his last as editor, it occurred to us that this would be an opportune moment for us to sit down with him to discuss his vision for the book and the anthology's role in the field.

This interview was conducted at Columbia University on 10 November 2025 and subsequently revised and edited over email.

Brent Hayes Edwards: Thanks for being willing to talk with us about your work on *The Translation Studies Reader*. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that the *Reader* has served a central role in the emergence and consolidation of translation studies, first of all by instilling a certain self-reflexivity among those involved in institutionalizing the field, making us take stock of its history and internal debates, without of course resolving those debates or imposing a stable tradition.

Lawrence Venuti: The *Reader* has always been grounded in a present moment of translation studies, a moment in which it was developing. Essential to the project over subsequent editions was an effort to keep it updated and timely by paying attention to what was happening in the journals and in conferences and by trying to get a grasp on larger patterns, the directions in which the field was heading. At the time of the first edition in 2000, the field had really just emerged within the previous few decades. It was from the 1960s onward that translation studies imagined itself as a field and began to be institutionalized in the academy through courses and curricula, degree programs and departments, even faculties or colleges.

I was always concerned with writing a history of translation from the vantage point of the present moment. I wanted to ask questions of the past that reflected where translation studies was at the time I was working on each edition, hoping to discover what was becoming dominant and what was being marginalized. That was central to the intellectual adventure.

Initially an editor at Routledge planned the *Reader* as a textbook that would serve this field that had seemed to explode during the 1990s with new programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels multiplying around the world. Before that Susan Bassnett had done a primer on translation studies for the Methuen New Accents series, and it began to be adopted as a textbook, one of the first to be widely used in the anglophone world. So when Routledge approached me to do a reader that would function as a textbook proper, I went into it very conscious of the fact that to undertake such a project is also to create a field. That way lies debate.

BHE: There's a great sentence in the introduction that has been retained in each of the editions over the years. You write, "Edited volumes always work to define a field, a body of knowledge, a

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textbook market, and so they create as much as satisfy institutional needs, especially in the case of emergent disciplines" (Introduction [2000] 1). So anthologies are not just synchronic: products of their moment, whatever's happening right now. They also involve a certain sort of hindsight or historical sensibility because, as you write, one of your criteria for selection is how "influential" a given text has been (2), which can only be gauged by tracking circulation and impact over time. And they simultaneously look forward in the way they aim to "create" a field. That activist or interventionist aspect of editing is where it risks debate, because you're selecting things in a way to push the field in new directions. To quote again from the introduction to the first edition, you write that "the intention is also to challenge any disciplinary complacency, to produce a consolidation that is interrogative, to show what translation studies have been and to suggest what they might be." Right from the table of contents, it's immediately apparent that there's no pregiven canon. The anthology is making the case that something like Ezra Pound's 1929 essay "Guido's Relations" should be recognized as a key theoretical text in the field. It's a sort of editorial wager.

LV: I agree. There was no settled canon. That became clear to me in the editorial process itself because the project actually began as a collaboration. Routledge asked me and Mona Baker to edit the volume together. It was enlightening—but also shocking, I have to say—to realize that we didn't agree on what the emerging field was. We had mapped it out in totally different ways.

We decided to proceed with each of us drafting a prospective table of contents. We thought we'd be able to use those drafts as a starting point for putting the anthology together. But our lists of readings articulated vastly different visions. Mona's drew especially on work coming out of linguistics, some of it very empirical work. My own list emphasized recent developments in literary and cultural studies from the 1970s onward.

The lists were products of our respective formations and orientations as scholars, so we shouldn't have been surprised. Still, I think we were both taken aback by how far apart we were. I had known Mona before the project, I worked with her on what was then her journal, *The Translator*, and we'd always gotten along well. But we had radically different concepts of what a textbook for the field should be. We realized that our collaboration simply wasn't going to work. She decided to withdraw.

Karen Van Dyck: It's fascinating that the *Reader* originated as a collaboration. It makes me think of the conversations Brent and I had when we first conceived our seminar. One of the things we realized we shared was a conviction that we would learn a great deal by teaching translation together—by pulling each other out of our respective comfort zones and by thinking across diasporas. Even if Mona withdrew, you still describe the *Reader* in that first introduction as the "fruit of . . . a collaboration" between the two of you (3). What did she end up doing? Did she give you feedback on the table of contents?

LV: At this point, I don't remember the nitty-gritty of the working process, but, yes, she was involved from the beginning. As I was putting it together, she was looking over my shoulder. Many of the selections were pieces she had chosen—there was a lot of linguistics in the first edition. I remember that she wanted something from J. C. Catford's *A Linguistic Theory of Translation.* And the piece by Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, very inventive linguists who were working on politeness in film subtitles. She was also in favor of some of the selections from philosophy and literature, including Willard Van Orman Quine and José Ortega y Gasset.

I insisted that we had to find a way to acknowledge her contribution. We decided that she would be listed as advisory editor.

One noticeable aspect of the first edition is what I would call a presentism, a focus on the twentieth century. With the second edition, the project was more broadly historicized, and that became the overriding editorial principle. That widened the range of collaborations largely because of my own limitations as a scholar. I turned to translators for help in selecting texts and extracts as well as in evaluating existing English versions of

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important texts. And I relied on area specialists to referee unpublished essays that I wanted to include. In a few cases, I was lucky to collaborate with authors who were willing to revise previously published work to fit the pedagogical context of the *Reader*, like Sherry Simon's chapter from her 2006 book on translating Montreal and Marwa Elshakry's 2008 article on Arabic translations of Western scientific texts.

BHE: Thinking about the first edition from the perspective of your own scholarly trajectory, how would you describe your work at the point you started working on the *Reader*? You had published *The Translator's Invisibility* in 1995. We were recently teaching the chapter "Margins" about modernism, or what might be called the Pound tradition of translation, and of course there are things in the *Reader* like the Pound selection that certainly seem to echo what's going on in your own scholarship—not that the anthology is anything as simple as a gathering of sources from your own work.

LV: My work came out of literary history and criticism as they were gradually being transformed into cultural studies with the influx of various theoretical and political discourses. In 1991 Antony Easthope published a smart book about that development. I was originally an early modern specialist, researching sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature. But I was also a translator from Italian, working mostly with twentieth-century literary texts, and the confluence of cultural studies and translation practice focused my research on translation. Within a few years of *The Translator's Invisibility*, I published *The Scandals of Translation*, where I used issues like authorship, copyright, ethics, and globalization to study the institutional and social constraints faced by translators.

KVD: As you started working on the first edition, what did you make of what a publisher would call "competing volumes": the handful of other anthologies available at the time (see Maitland)? I think of André Lefevere's *Translation/History/Culture* (1992), or the volume *Theories of Translation* that John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte published the same year, or Douglas Robinson's *Western Translation Theory* (1997). How did you see the landscape?

LV: What Mona and I were doing was quite different from the anthologies that had already been published. None of those other editors was interested in marking out the field. They all did valuable things, of course. The Biguenet and Schulte anthology has been a bestseller for Chicago, in print continuously. It still gets a lot of use in research-oriented courses as well as creative writing workshops, where it is sometimes joined by their earlier anthology, *The Craft of Translation* (1989), a collection of essays by distinguished translators. The Robinson book is an idiosyncratic history that stops in 1900—interesting but not concerned with the academic field as such. Aside from these things in English, there were also attempts in other languages, like Hans Joachim Störig's anthology of German translation theory. That collection was more historical. Mona and I imagined a textbook that would document the rise of translation studies.

BHE: Some of your editorial choices really stand out to me. There's an emphasis on the apparatus, first of all. In the Biguenet and Schulte books as well as in the Lefevere, there is minimal contextualization: biographical headnotes before each selection, but nothing like the historical map you provide. Your section introductions are crucial, too, in framing the selections, in providing additional references, and in pointing to what you *don't* include: "to supply some omissions and sketch a historical setting," as you write (Introduction [2000] 2). So the *Reader* is framed in a way that rejects any implication that it is claiming to be comprehensive. It points to paths not taken and encourages users to supplement the anthology with other readings.

The other aspect that strikes me as a major departure is that you organize it chronologically. The selections in Lefevere's anthology are arranged according to thematic clusters ("The Role of Ideology"; "The Power of Patronage"; "Poetics"; "The Technique of Translating," etc.). Your historicism seems like a very deliberate choice. And you also almost always use full

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texts, whereas these predecessor volumes tend to use short excerpts of varying lengths.

LV: In approaching the *Reader* as a textbook, I realized that it was fundamentally a historicist project. Even if the first edition was limited to the twentieth century, it had to be organized chronologically. I was acutely aware not only of creating a historical consciousness but also of avoiding any sort of evolutionary narrative.

This didn't mean ignoring thematic juxtapositions and argumentative lineages. My work on the *Reader* as well as my own research has benefited enormously from the well-chosen excerpts in Lefevere's *Translation/History/Culture*. But using theme as an organizing principle creates another kind of theoretical problem insofar as choosing any theme risks excluding others in a particular period. The question that became important for me was how to represent the different possibilities in a historical moment. To organize an anthology thematically would limit or militate against that sort of multiplicity.

In turning to chronology, I needed to come up with a historiographical principle. The most decisive influence for me was Michel Foucault's genealogical method—the idea of going back to the past not to find a single coherent origin but to reveal dynamic hierarchies and constitutive exclusions.

I knew that including a piece in the *Reader* was unavoidably a canonizing gesture that proliferated questions. What was I leaving out? What had been omitted from the canons of the past? The apparatus, especially the introductions to the various chronological sections, couldn't take the form of a linear progression rigorously plotted from one work to the next. I felt it was important to give some sense of the different approaches adopted by particular cultures. I had to create contexts in which the chapters would still float, admittedly, but in relation to ongoing debates.

Some of the selections effectively served as exemplifications of what was happening at a given time. It struck me that many of the texts would be unfamiliar, and that the history of translation theory and commentary had been written in a variety of ways that were very piecemeal, just as the attention to translation in the academy had been fragmented across fields and disciplines. So I made a conscious decision to privilege full texts rather than excerpts.

BHE: Looking back over the tables of contents, I realized how important one decision in the first edition was for me: after the first selection, Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," you included a short note by Steven Rendall about the Harry Zohn translation, pointing out certain problems and omissions. As an opening gesture in an anthology of translation studies, it's very interesting because it makes the English-language reader confront the fact that so many theories of translation are themselves translations. And—as someone who had first read the Zohn translation in Benjamin's *Illuminations*, the hugely influential 1968 selection of his writings—it suggested that we shouldn't consider those translations as sacrosanct. In other words, Zohn's version of Benjamin is itself an interpretation. So it sets the stage for your own framing of the field and your argument for the hermeneutic approach.

LV: Every book project has its moments of serendipity. When I met Steve in the 1990s, he was an accomplished scholar of French literature at the University of Oregon as well as a prolific translator from French and German. He had translated Michel de Certeau's groundbreaking study, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, among many other texts, literary, historical, and theoretical. We met at a summer NEH seminar on translation at SUNY Binghamton. I had always wondered about the Zohn translation, which seemed to me almost mystical. Steve helped me understand how Zohn foregrounded a messianic theme in Benjamin's essay. He subsequently published an article about Zohn's version in the Canadian journal *TTR*, and I asked him to condense it into a short note for the *Reader*.

Not only did it make a provocative addition to the volume, but it served to highlight the dominance of English in translation studies. As I point out in the introduction, the most influential works in translation theory and commentary since antiquity have not been written in English. Yet Mona and

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I were convinced that for a text to have any power in the field at the end of the twentieth century, it had to be written in or translated into English (see Introduction [2000] 3). For me, that irony hovers over the entire project of the *Reader*.

When I prepared the first edition, I was required to use the Zohn translation (and pay for permission) because Harcourt Brace Jovanovich still owned the English-language rights. By the third edition, Benjamin's work had entered the public domain, and I was able to commission Steve to do a new translation, which he titled "The Translator's Task."

KVD: You're also a translator yourself, like many of us in translation studies. And many of the institutional spaces that are opening up for translation are focused on training, on teaching budding translators how to translate in one domain or another. In editing the *Reader* as a textbook, how were you thinking about the practitioner? Or were you more focused on the history and theory of translation as your object of study? Were you drawing a distinction between theory and practice?

LV: No, I wasn't drawing that distinction. There was a constant dialectic between my research and my translation practice. When I first started to read translation theory and commentary historically—when I found Friedrich Schleiermacher and Pound—it immediately increased the sophistication of my practice. Developing a theoretical self-consciousness about what I was doing, questioning my own conceptual orientation, changed me irrevocably as a translator.

I had published five book-length translations with both commercial and university presses before I "got theory," as I like to say. This was in the mid-1980s, the period when waves of literary and cultural theory were washing over English departments, and so as an assistant professor of English at Temple University, I had to come to terms with it. The result is that it transformed not only my scholarship, which had been very literary historical up to that point, but also my translation practice. I became more experimental.

Inevitably, then, I saw the readings that came to be included in the first edition of the *Reader* as having a practical impact. I saw the book as creating a curricular support for two kinds of approaches to translation—research and practice—which I thought needed to be conjoined. This remains a vexed issue. In all the debates about theory "versus" practice, there is so much condescension going in both directions.

BHE: Yes. It's striking that there's just as much condescension and scorn, even open hostility, among practitioners toward the very notion of translation theory as there is arrogance among theorists.

KVD: We've seen this with the different student constituencies who take the course at Columbia, whether they come from language and literature departments in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the School of International and Public Affairs, or the MFA program in writing in the School of the Arts. I am thinking particularly of the iteration of the seminar I taught with the writer and filmmaker Xiaolu Guo, when we compared the Greek with the Chinese diaspora rather than the African. Because of Xiaolu we had more students than usual who were practitioners. I'd say the reaction wasn't so much hostility as utter bewilderment. Do we really have to read so many pages of theory? they would ask.

LV: Starting especially with the second edition of the *Reader*, the most broadly historicizing edition, I wanted to make the point that immersing yourself in theory would make you more self-conscious and therefore better as a translator. That was the motivation, even if I didn't say it explicitly.

Even in the first edition, a number of pieces were more or less applicable to translation practice. I included an extract from the Canadian linguists Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, who developed a detailed translation methodology in the 1950s: it took the form of verbal strategies that were described as "direct" or "oblique" in relation to the source text (84). I also included Philip Lewis's 1985 essay, "The Measure of Translation Effects," which sets out from the differences between French and English as analyzed by the French linguist Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher and then develops a notion of "abusive fidelity" with the help of Jacques Derrida's

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thinking about language (279). Guillemin-Flescher grounds her linguistic analysis on several translations of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which help to give Lewis's speculation a more practical orientation.

Readings that focus solely on research can nonetheless enrich translation practice. Under the influence of Russian formalism, so-called polysystem theorists like Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury push practicing translators to think about the relative position of their work in the receiving culture, whether it is "central" or "peripheral" (Even-Zohar 193), and to consider how that positioning might shape the linguistic and cultural "norms" that motivate their verbal choices (Toury). Even if no translator can be aware of every condition that enables a translation project or anticipate every consequence that may ensue, a translator should be able to assess where a translation might hit in the translating language and culture, what values, beliefs, and representations it might support or challenge, what images of the source text and culture it might engage, and what implications it might carry for the status of translation and translators.

BHE: The most overt instance of the argument is that powerful quotation from Antoine Berman you include in the introduction to the second edition: "A translator without a historical consciousness [remains] a prisoner to his or her representation of translating and to those representations that convey the 'social discourses' of the moment" (2). It's worth noting that the quotation is itself a translation, your own version of a sentence from a posthumous book by Berman that was not published in English until 2009—so its very inclusion is a demonstration of the point about the need for historical consciousness.

LV: Definitely.

KVD: So you would welcome the way we use the *Reader* in our course. We try to get our students to see it as a sort of handbook for practicing translators, in which we can approach the selections—whether Schleiermacher's call for taking the reader abroad, or Benjamin's elliptical closing remarks on interlinear translation, or Roman Jakobson's ideas about intersemiotic translation, or Vladimir Nabokov's call for translations annotated by "footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of the page" (83), or Vicente Rafael's reflections on the politics of intralingual translation (first included in the third edition), or my own work on strategies for handling translingual literature (first included in the fourth edition)—as suggesting an array of specific strategies we can employ when we translate. Approaching the selections that way can sometimes feel eccentric, even transgressive. But Brent and I are always pleasantly surprised to see how quickly the students get it: they start learning how to read as translators.

LV: I wanted to open that door. The fact is, there's always an issue of how explicitly a particular reading deals with translation strategies, and how robustly it imagines the function of verbal choices in relation to the translation's situation in a culture. Some readings are farther away from practical considerations, but I think every reading contains implications for practice.

Using the *Reader* as a textbook obviously depends on the kind of course the instructor is constructing. I have taught what I call seminars in theory and practice, which are really workshops that give equal attention to theoretical material. In the second half of the course, students critique their classmate's extended translation projects. In the first half, however, we're establishing a conceptual vocabulary for the workshop conversations by discussing chapters from the *Reader*, moving both chronologically and thematically. Jerome is always instructive on translation strategies, a powerful source of that now cliché dichotomy between word-for-word and sense-for-sense translation. Then we juxtapose Schleiermacher and Eugene Nida to show the link between different concepts of equivalence and opposing treatments of linguistic-cultural difference, distinguishing a translation that aims to send the reader abroad from a translation that seeks to relate the source text to the receiving culture. To learn that the former kind of translating was

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enlisted in the service of Prussian nationalism during the Napoleonic wars, whereas the latter drove the Christian evangelical mission of colonial ventures, can transform a student translator's conception of what translation is and does.

BHE: Staging that comparison between Schleiermacher and Nida, even if they're far away from each other in historical terms, becomes a way to foreground what you describe in the introduction as the key question of the relationship between equivalence and function (see Introduction [2000] 5).

LV: Yes. At a certain point in the sequence of editions, I started to develop theoretical frameworks that would enable researchers and practitioners to think about their work in the same terms. One way to answer the fundamental question of what translation is and does is to distinguish between different models, instrumental versus hermeneutic. Do you think of the verbal choices you're making as reproducing an invariant contained in the source text? Or is each of your verbal choices an interpretive move, inscribing one among many interpretive possibilities?

That terminology was first formulated by a Canadian linguist named Louis Kelly. I came upon his work as I was trying to find conceptual tools for understanding translation as a writing practice. Then I began to revise Kelly's categories to make them serviceable to thinking broadly about translation, and to move toward a hermeneutic approach in a more decisive way.

It struck me that this might be a way of exposing the limitations of dividing theory from practice. When you start thinking about your translation practice as an interpretive act, it creates a set of theoretical and practical requirements that you have to work out. If you're approaching translation from an instrumentalist perspective, as a matter of manufacturing a one-to-one correspondence, then it becomes pretty mechanical. The notion of accuracy or fidelity is basically restrictive, aside from all the theoretical ruses it involves.

BHE: With the second edition of the *Reader* in 2004, there are some momentous shifts. As you mentioned, the first edition is limited to the twentieth century. It opens with interwar modernism: Benjamin, Pound, Jorge Luis Borges, Ortega y Gasset. You mention Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt in the introduction, but you emphasize the point that the ideas of early nineteenth-century German romanticism are rethought from the vantage of modernist movements in the twentieth century. That setup frames the history of translation studies in a particular way.

In the second edition, things start much earlier. While the table of contents still contains sections divided by decades ("1900–1930s"; "1940s–1950s"; "1960s–1970s"; "1980s"; "1990s and Beyond"), the opening section of the anthology is now titled simply "Foundational Statements." It suggests that we can locate the origins of translation studies in a set of classic texts. How did you come to make that major change?

LV: The second edition was so exciting. It felt like entire vistas were opening up. It was exhilarating to realize I could do anything—I could bring in sources from antiquity to the present. I still had only five hundred pages to work with, but I thought, let's go further back and see what happens.

To start with, I decided to get new translations of texts like Jerome's "Letter to Pammachius" and Schleiermacher's "On the Different Methods of Translating." I translated Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt's prefaces to his French translations of Tacitus and Lucian. It was 2004: How many people were reading these texts?

BHE: It's clearly an intervention. You're trying to shake things up. I doubt that most people were starting with Jerome in their Introduction to Translation courses in 2004.

LV: One way to imagine the history of translation theory and commentary is to draw on the model of surveys of literary theory and criticism. In the 1980s, those kinds of courses had become common. You began with Plato and went up to Derrida. There were textbooks like Hazard Adams's *Critical Theory Since Plato*. I realized that the history of translation theory could be outlined in a similar

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way, as a survey from antiquity to the present. At the same time, I didn't want to give up the idea that this was the kind of learning that every practicing translator should have. All translators should have a sense of where translation comes from, the same way poets have a sense of where poetry comes from.

Organizing the *Reader* chronologically allowed me to include a section at the end that sampled the latest research. This section has seen the most revision in each subsequent edition. It aims to capture what is happening at the current moment as well as to make predictions about where the field is going. For me, the pain of exclusion is always the greatest in that final section.

KVD: So how did you decide what to leave in and what to take out for each new edition?

LV: I didn't want to do cosmetic updates. If there was going to be a new edition, the whole project had to be completely rethought from the perspective of a new moment. It was clear that there were patterns and trends in the field, and I tried to make the *Reader* responsive to them. For example, between the first and second editions it was my sense that linguistics had lost its primacy in translation research, and so some of that material came out.

Yet linguistics would still be represented in the section introductions. I think that's important. The removal of a chapter from the table of contents did not mean that the chapter was no longer mentioned. An account of it remained.

Certain revisions were controversial, like the removal of James Holmes's 1972 essay "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies." Some users of the *Reader* wondered how I could remove the essay that named the field. As the years passed, however, it became clear that Holmes's conception was linguistics-oriented, fundamentally empiricist, and this evidently led him to omit aspects of translation research and practice that later assumed importance in the field: his essay does not address ethics, for example, or history. A critique of this formative text appeared before long.

All the same, the removal of Holmes's essay doesn't diminish its historical value. In my own expansive view of the project, anything that has been included in any of the five editions is worth reading. We should first attribute a removal to arbitrary space constraints. It also reflects, in a way that is not arbitrary, the contingencies of the developing discipline—the fact that work can become less important as time passes. Whereas Holmes's influence has arguably faded, something like polysystem theory has continued to be validated in multiple fields and disciplines. A theorist like Franco Moretti, for instance, has cited Even-Zohar's work as foundational for our understanding of world literature (112).

KVD: "Foundational" is a complicated adjective because it begs the question, For whom and in what tradition? Would something that was foundational for Benjamin necessarily be foundational for Borges as well?

LV: The question of "Foundational Statements" was difficult because I was anthologizing a history of the present. And influence on the present became a criterion of inclusion, leading me to selections that had had a sustained impact in one way or another. At first, I construed the impact as international, if not global. But entire translation traditions have emerged within languages, cultures, nations, and they are eminently worth studying even if the impact of those traditions did not exceed their national boundaries. The first and second editions are still extremely Eurocentric, emphasizing French and German, but the fourth and fifth begin to gather materials from Asian and Middle Eastern traditions, and that helped to point up the notion of translation movements, collective efforts to produce translations, usually centered on specific bodies of texts, designed to serve cultural and social functions, and often institutionally supported. The Chinese translations of the Buddhist sutras would fall into this category, as would the Arabic translations of Greek scientific texts during the Abbasid caliphate.

BHE: I wonder how you thought about the comparativist aspect of the project. The *Reader* isn't just a collection of texts on translation from German romanticism or Russian formalism. And even as the later editions start to frame translation studies globally, the *Reader* isn't attempting to provide a

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comprehensive overview of translation theory in Chinese or Arabic, either. You're not giving us a deep view into any particular tradition. Given the page count restrictions, you're dipping into all these strands of thinking about translation in a way that makes the user approach the topic comparatively, putting John Dryden, say, next to Schleiermacher. And the goal seems to be to make us confront the differences, rather than to pretend that these disparate statements add up to a consensus.

LV: You're right about the aim of confronting differences. This is precisely the point of the sentence from the introduction you quoted earlier: "to produce a consolidation that is interrogative."

Starting with the third edition, it became a question of expanding a canon that had been created partly by the book itself—and complicating that canon. For some users, it was a development too slow in coming, but things move slowly in academia. It required a good deal of caution because there is a risk of tokenism, and you have to confront the problem of representing disparate translation traditions with a limited number of selections.

In the second edition, German romanticism had been represented by Schleiermacher's lecture and an extract from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *West-Eastern Diwan*. They worked well together, partly because Goethe's text pointed to a larger context. His opening sketches different epochs of translation, providing a broader sense of what was happening in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than Schleiermacher's focused treatment from a philosophical perspective. The section introduction supplemented these pieces by discussing Humboldt and Johann Gottfried Herder.

In later editions, the question was how to do something similar with translation traditions outside Europe. I picked texts that were highly influential in their own moments and cultural contexts, even if they didn't have an international impact—a factor that was constrained by asymmetries in political and economic power.

I had previously done some work on Chinese translators, and I wanted to draw on that research in the *Reader*. The Chinese tradition included fascinating figures like the tremendously prolific Lin Shu, who translated Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I thought that could create an interesting contrast to Western traditions. I then used the section introductions to give a sense of the broader historical context in which a translator like Lin Shu was working.

BHE: It's another editorial wager. You're hoping for uptake: that people teaching translation studies will begin to include the Chinese tradition and use these texts as points of entry.

LV: I was disappointed in some cases. As publishers tend to do with anthologies and textbooks, Routledge sent out questionnaires to instructors who used the book. There were also readers' reports that commented on my proposals. In revising each new edition, I tried to be responsive to feedback and suggestions from users. But some responses were frustrating. One reader report for the fifth edition declared that the Chinese material was only of interest to Chinese readers. I couldn't believe it.

KVD: It's surprising—and not surprising at all. Those biases are so deeply ingrained. You see it in another way with the Greek case. Some things can ever only be treated as parochial or "minor," while others are automatically granted universal relevance.

LV: This is a battle that has to be fought. An established anthology can at least set the terms of debate.

BHE: Is the goal then something we could describe as a global history of translation? Or is it inherently heterogeneous—a compendium of partial histories that don't add up to a single story?

LV: The heterogeneity lets you see the differences across contexts. It doesn't iron them out. Now that there are five editions of the *Reader*, if we think of their changing tables of contents as one ongoing project, it becomes possible not only to map a trajectory of translation theory and commentary in Europe but also to undertake a historical comparison of translation traditions in several languages: French, German, English, Chinese, and now Arabic. Some selections, such as the piece by Pascale Casanova first included

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in the fourth edition, provide models for thinking about the unequal exchanges among these different traditions. Her theory of world literature is one way to consider what the *Reader* has become.

BHE: In the introduction, drawing on George Steiner, you point out that translation inherently presumes a "systematic theory of language" (Introduction [2000] 5). And we might add that any understanding of language is situated: it involves a construction of an outside, an elsewhere, in relation to particular other languages. It makes a difference that Benjamin is thinking specifically from German to French and—in the discussion of scripture at the end—to Hebrew. Or that Nabokov is thinking from English toward Russian, but also about the influence of French in Russian.

LV: Benjamin and Nabokov each belong to what I like to call a translation culture. They look abroad and see different areas of interest as worthy of translation, areas that answer to their own historical moments. The 1930s correspondence between Qu Qiubai and Lu Xun included in the fourth edition exemplifies a Chinese translation culture: they discuss Chinese versions of key Russian texts in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, but they also refer to the early Chinese translations of the Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit and Pali, so the exchange points back to the selections from Zhi Qian and Dao'an in the "Foundational Statements" section.

KVD: Can you give us a preview of the changes you've made for the forthcoming fifth edition? Or, to put it differently, how does the new version attempt to reflect the current state of the field?

LV: In the fifth edition I still have the sections divided by decades, although the time periods are longer and more pointed ("1900–1950s"; "1960s–1990s"; "2000s–2020s"), and I've added subtitles to indicate themes that coalesce across traditions in different geographic and linguistic areas. Thus, the subtitle for "1900s–1950s" is "Modernism, *Bildung*, Untranslatability," referring to the considerable influence of German romanticism on modernist translation and clarifying further how the readings in the section called "Foundational Statements" might be seen as truly foundational. The subtitles help the user navigate the comparative history of translation that the *Reader* is trying to outline. To return to one of the examples I mentioned earlier, Lin Shu's commentary on Stowe at the turn of the twentieth century can be read as a harbinger of the identity politics that enters Western translation theory in the 1990s.

BHE: Speaking with you about editing *The Translation Studies Reader*, it occurs to me that there's an interesting parallel between translating and editing. In your 2021 conversation with Duncan Large of the British Centre for Literary Translation, you point out that like translation, editing is a "second-order practice" involving "prior materials that are recontextualized" (Large). And editing the *Reader* is likewise an interpretive act in the way that you are constructing a genealogy through the interpretation of a textual history.

LV: Scholarship on textual editing has undergone a metamorphosis since the 1960s. I think of the work of scholars like Jerome McGann—it has opened up so many rich avenues of inquiry over the past few decades. The approach took a while to seep into translation studies, but it has. The first translation scholar to explore this parallel was Lefevere, whose 1992 book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* treats the editing of anthologies as a form of rewriting or refraction, like translation. The issue has been addressed more recently by Karen Emmerich, whose 2017 book *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals* argues that translation involves translingual editing.

An interesting possibility raised by translation is that it can be seen as a sort of master trope for thinking about second-order practices in different media, or what Roland Barthes called metalanguages: an order or system of signification that takes as its starting point and raison d'être a prior signifying process, a preexisting chain of signifiers. We can consider the relation between those first and second orders of signification as hermeneutic. In this way, thinking about translation might be

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useful in understanding a wide range of other such practices, from parody and pastiche to ekphrasis to the performance of a script or a score to film adaptation. Or even museum work: curating an exhibition also involves something that can be usefully described as a kind of translation, provided we consider translation an interpretive act. I hope that the *Reader*, in making a case for a hermeneutic model of translation, can catalyze the work of thinking across disciplines.

BHE: One recent development that has prompted a great deal of debate and even bouts of panic in the field is the dizzyingly rapid emergence of neural machine translation: artificial intelligence applications capable of producing translations with a speed and facility that some worry may soon threaten the viability of the profession altogether. Of course, this changing landscape will have major implications for the study of translation as well.

KVD: At the same time, as we were preparing for our class this fall, both Brent and I were struck by the fact that—despite all the doomsday rhetoric surrounding automated translation—student interest in our seminar had doubled. Why at this very moment when the future of human translators is itself so uncertain do we have more students wanting to think about translation and translate? Why are they more exhilarated by the political and ethical challenges and poetic possibilities of hands-on translation practice?

LV: What exactly is the current situation of translation and the use of computer technologies? In 2024, an international survey of translators distributed through professional associations and social media received 425 responses (Farrell). It distinguished carefully among technologies between neural machine translators trained on parallel corpora of source texts and their translations (*Google Translate*, *DeepL*) and generative AI trained on data in different domains (*ChatGPT*, *DeepSeek*). The results indicated that an overwhelming majority of human translators were using machine translation (73.4%) with a smaller percentage (29.4%) using AI as well. The advent of computer-produced translations that are fluent and accurate confronts human translators with obsolescence, an inability to compete against the greater efficiency and lower cost of the technologies.

How we should react to this situation isn't clear, but we would first need to decide how to frame the problem. Is it the loss of a market for human translation? Imagine a future where machines are doing the bulk of the translating, and the work of human translators becomes rare and expensive, fetishized as "bespoke" or "boutique" translation, extolled by aficionados, and commissioned by patrons, agencies, and institutions for whatever purpose suits them. In this future, human translations are distinguished from machine output by error, or stylistic mannerism, whatever literary tics might be associated with a translator's byline. I wonder if the increase in student interest you're seeing is linked to the possibility of translation experiments, creating unique stylistic features in the face of machinic production.

The question, in other words, is how human translators can create a new necessity for their work. The machine can be useful insofar as it supports the translator's hermeneutic role of inscribing an interpretation in the source text. Future translators will draw on huge databases, corpora of texts that contain not only other translations in the translating language but also the print and electronic media that circulate around source texts and translations in their own languages and others. Forms of computational analysis currently in use, like word embeddings and topic modeling, can locate patterns of semantic similarity as well as the themes and discourses that interpret both source texts and their translations. Entire histories of reception can be mapped out in different languages, the discourses and ideologies that inform those histories, creating an interpretive framework within which to formulate new translation strategies. Machines now provide translation solutions according to statistical probabilities drawn from translation databases, selecting the most frequently used and therefore the most familiar lexicon and syntax. But machines can also display a range of verbal choices that challenge frequency with more nuanced and stranger options, presenting new opportunities to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the source text.

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Translators can build their interpretations, and scholars study the history of translation, with computational analyses of databases. The idea is to construct a collaboration with technologies that redefines the scope of human involvement, increasing its learning and sophistication. If the machine possesses a basic level of translational competence, making it capable of translating accurately and fluently, it might be employed to enlarge the interpretive acts that every human translator performs.

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