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# Localism

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Inductive reasoning is not new in the history of human thought, and yet what is arguably novel is a tendency towards a detailed, painstaking contextualization of small-scale phenomena. This has been given different labels in several disciplines in the last few decades: microhistory, new historicism, thick description, etc. Localism is another term for this tendency, although it seems to be more frequently used to distinguish local(ized) forms of government from centralized ones, the emphasis of the former being on local communities and their identity.

The term was first applied to Translation Studies (TS) by Tymoczko (1999) and exemplifies a type of research focused on specific translation activities, aimed at mapping the details of their linguistic, historical and cultural contexts. Tymoczko's main insight is her ability to establish a strong link between localism and metonymical modes of conceptualization in TS.

Translation has often been represented as a metaphorical process, striving towards a faithful reproduction of the ST by insisting upon an ideal notion of equivalence. A metonymical approach, on the other hand, works on relations of contiguity and connection and ends up by producing complex images that do not aim at replacing the ST, but, rather, stand in a dialogic relation with it. From a methodological point of view, metonymic processes work comparatively creating meaningful links between translation phenomena and their geographic, historic, socio-cultural context.

The intrinsic partiality of translation has been exposed by many scholars (cf. Lefevere 1992; Venuti 1995). Yet its metonymic nature, as a representation of the ST in which parts of it substitute for the whole, had never been given prominence before the appearance of the localism concept. Other disciplines, such as ethnography, had experienced a similar interpretive turn earlier. Geertz's "thick description" (1973) – a dense narrative strategy relating the images it creates to broader comparative concerns – transcends a mere descriptive scope: in fact it establishes a contiguity between local experience and its broader socio-cultural context.

Dichotomies, born out of a metaphorical logic, have been increasingly criticized in TS: their either/or perspective makes it difficult for researchers to investigate those ambivalent, or idiosyncratic cases characterizing the practice of translation. A different logic, working via association and connection would avoid the danger of generalization, being committed to fully depicting the complexity of translation activities. As a consequence, "localised" descriptive studies of translation may become emblematic for the theory of translation as a whole, providing pluralistic modes of perception, hence stimulating new theoretical thought (cf. Agorni 2007).

Analyses inspired (more or less explicitly) by this methodology have already been produced in such varied fields as translation history (Agorni 2002), postcolonial studies (Tymoczko 1999), travel writing (Polezzi 2001) and museum studies (Sturge 2007). At the same time, however, the risk that a focus on the local might lead to interpretations of culture as inexorably fixed had been voiced by Hall as early as 1991. Chesterman (2008) also warned us against the danger that practices such as localism may produce an unnecessary restriction of scope, precluding a vision of broad, general translation patterns – a risk that, however, should be counteracted by the fundamental comparative nature of this approach.

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