

THE DESCRIPTIVE PARADOX, OR HOW THEORY CAN AFFECT PRACTICE

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Abstract

The article discusses and illustrates the potential tension between theory and the practice that it describes, beginning with the claim by Jean Boase-Beier (2011) that theory can affect translation practice. By way of introduction, a comparison is made with the way artists are influenced by theories e.g. of perspective and colour, following Gombrich. With respect to translation practice, three possible channels are proposed whereby theory might affect practice: prescriptive teaching, tacit theory, and descriptive theory. Each of these channels raises problems. Prescriptive theory is mentioned only briefly; most translators nowadays are untrained. More attention is given to tacit, implicit theory, and its role in the practice of (trained or untrained) translators. But the main focus is on the descriptive paradox itself, as manifested in Descriptive Translation Studies. This paradox arises when the act of describing affects the phenomenon described, so that the description itself no longer fits. The author then draws on his own experience of how his explicit knowledge of translation theory may have influenced his translation of a Finnish novel (*Canal Grande*, by Hannu Raittila; not yet published in English). He is not entirely convinced, however, that he can actually prove the influence of theory in this case.

Keywords

Descriptive theory, practice, norms, universals, Finnish.

Introduction

In her recent book on literary translation (*A Critical Introduction to Translation Studies*), Jean Boase-Beier claims that theory affects, or at least can affect, translation practice (2011, 82, 160). I found myself wondering how this claim could be tested. A universal generalization that theory *always* affects practice would be easy to falsify, if we could produce one instance of translation that had not been affected by any kind of theory. This is a path I will not pursue here. Rather, let us consider the weaker, and presumably more realistic claim, that theory *can* affect practice. Boase-Beier argues that theory can sensitize translators as readers, raise key issues and problems to be solved, and orient translators towards finding appropriate solutions.

In a nutshell, I argue below that if theory can have an effect on practice, there must be channels through which it can work, and I suggest three. But there are problems with all three, and one of the problems is the descriptive paradox. I then test the claim on examples from my own (albeit limited) experience as a literary translator. I end up feeling rather more sceptical than when I started.

Consider first a similar idea from the history of art, an idea that is explored in E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, first published in 1960. This book is subtitled "A study in the psychology of pictorial representation". Reading and re-reading this classic, I have long been struck by the relevance of Gombrich's argument to translation, although he does not mention this topic. After all, translations too seek to represent something, they are concerned with mimesis. Where art has often aimed at fidelity to nature, translations aim at some kind of equivalence to a source. But just as "no artist can copy what

he sees" (Gombrich, 1960/1977, xi), no translator can produce a perfect copy of the original. What the artist and the translator do is create an illusion of their source, then (hence the title of the book).

In so doing, however, artists (and translators) do not work in a vacuum. We do not see with innocent eyes, but in the way we have *learned* to see. What we actually see is largely inferred from what we know. And what we know depends largely on cultural conventions. For instance, in art, the discovery of the laws of perspective radically changed the ways in which artists represented relative distance in their pictures. Similarly, the changing styles in the use of colour in art can be seen to have been influenced by the increasing knowledge of how colour is perceived in different contexts. Look for instance at John Constable's *Wivenhoe Park*, painted in 1816; it is the first colour plate in Gombrich's book.⁶ Note the small size of the house in the distance: Constable was certainly familiar with the theory of perspective. Note also the gradation to darker greens in the foreground, and how greens are made to look yellow in the sunlight.

So representations are always interpretations based on what we know, and only metonymic interpretations at that. Knowledge increases, too: hence the ever-present possibility of other possible interpretations, for instance in other styles. For Gombrich, styles are conventional answers to a given skill problem (such as how to represent relative distance), a particular answer that is preferred over alternative answers. The range of alternative answers is restricted by the artist's awareness and knowledge of what previous artists have done, and also by his medium: for instance, the range of possible colours available at the time. In other words, the artist is constrained by the available repertoire of possibilities and norms, although "constrained" here obviously does not mean "totally imprisoned": norms can be broken.

Gombrich suggests further that pictures are artists' experiments with representation; that true representations are those that do not convey false information (compare the notion of equivalence in translation); that form follows from function (cf. Skopos Theory, which argues that the form of translations is determined primarily by their purpose or skopos: see e.g. Reiß and Vermeer, 1984); and that artists are pulled by existing schemata (standardized forms, normative solutions), which they may nevertheless seek to adjust or resist and hence develop. Towards the end of the book there is a discussion of equivalence that seems to speak directly to translation scholars. Gombrich emphasizes, for instance, how an artist aims to persuade a viewer to accept a picture as representing something, as if by presenting a hypothesis, but that a viewer may reject this hypothesis; compare claims about possible equivalence, which may or may not be accepted by readers (cf. Pym, 1995). In 1843 Joseph Turner painted a work he called *Light and Colour (Goethe's theory) — The Morning after the Deluge — Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*.⁷ But it is not easy to see the connection between Moses writing Genesis and the abstract swirl of colour before our eyes. This picture actually shows the direct influence of Goethe's colour theory, which fascinated Turner. Note for instance the use of the colour yellow, which for Goethe symbolized "plus" values such as energy and the sun; yellow was believed to be the first colour derived from light. All colours, thought Goethe, came from the play of light and darkness. Goethe also theorized about the perception of colour: note how Turner represents the image of an eyeball, where the yellow colour darkens towards the edges as the point of view moves away from the centre.

⁶ (see e.g. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Constable_-_Wivenhoe_Park,_Essex_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg; last accessed 8.8.2013).

⁷ (see e.g. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-light-and-colour-goethes-theory-the-morning-after-the-deluge-moses-writing-the-book-n00532>; last accessed 8.8.2013)

How translation theory might influence translators

So is translation like this, with translators being affected by theories? If this is, or at least can be, the case, there must be channels through which this influence can flow. I will now suggest three such channels: prescriptive training; the formation of tacit theory; and the descriptive paradox of explicit descriptive theory.

Prescriptive training

I suppose the most obvious channel is translator training. This is how theory can be applied prescriptively. In the days before descriptivism came to dominate Translation Studies, the aim of theory was usually taken to be the provision of guidelines to be taught to students, about how best to solve various kinds of translation problems (see e.g. Newmark, 1981). Indeed, as discussed in the book Emma Wagner and I wrote on the relation between theory and practice (Chesterman and Wagner, 2002), this prescriptive view of theory is what many professional translators still apparently expect of Translation Studies, and they are disappointed to find so little of it there these days. This is because in our current descriptive age, the overtly prescriptive approach has been relegated to the status of an *application* of theory. When we train translators professionally, we make use of theoretical concepts like "skopos" (purpose) or "pragmatic equivalence" (equivalent effect), and hope that these will have a beneficial effect on the quality of the work eventually produced by our students, together of course with masses of practice and feedback. And no doubt this is usually the case, but a number of reservations need to be made.

In the first place, an increasing number of translations done today are not done by trained professionals, but by amateurs who have presumably had very little, if any, prescriptive exposure to translation theory. In these cases, there can have been no direct channel for prescriptive theory to affect their practice via training. I guess that even literary translators have not always been trained as translators; and even if they were, the training may not have included much theory.

In the second place, among translators whose training has exposed them to theoretical work, the effect of the theory may not be beneficial at all, but negative, producing frustration and the need to unlearn what has been learned. An example of this is documented in Kaisa Koskinen's study of EU translation (2008, 98f), which shows that trained EU translators find that their working environment in Brussels and Luxembourg is, in some circumstances, such that all their prescriptive training in target-oriented translation theories must be jettisoned. During focus group interviews with translators on this topic, the responses Koskinen notes ranged from expressions of frustration to outright laughter, as translators recalled their experiences of trying to apply what they had been taught to translation tasks that simply didn't meet the assumptions of their training. As an EU translator, she claims, sometimes one evidently has to forget about the importance of considering the skopos, of the translator being a communication expert, of audience design, of expecting a careful brief, and so on. The reality of EU translation includes the fact that some texts are translated merely because, for legal reasons, they just have to *exist* in all the official languages, not because they are actually going to be *read* by anyone: they are not really going to be instances of communication at all. The EU translators Koskinen interviewed thus experienced a gap between the professional ideal they had learned, justified by a prescriptive functional theory, and some aspects of the reality of working in this particular institution. One wonders how many trained translators working in other environments have also experienced such a gap between the theory they have been taught and their real-life work. If this feeling is widespread, perhaps something is wrong with the theory, or with the way it is taught (or with prevailing expectations of quality)?

There has been little research, as far as I know, on how the explicit prescriptive teaching of different translation theories affects the translation practice of different groups of students. Do courses based on functional theories eventually lead to more successful translation practices (on some measure) than courses based on contrastive analysis or on theories of equivalence? Or, in interpreting: do graduates of the Paris School based on the notion of deverbalization (the idea that good interpreters immediately detach meaning from form; see e.g. Seleskovitch and Lederer 1984) tend to get better jobs than graduates of schools with a syllabus based more on an empirical science approach (such as the Trieste School; see e.g. Gran and Dodds, 1989)?

Tacit theory

A second channel of potential influence from theory to practice centres on the notion of what we could call tacit or implicit theory (compare the concept of tacit knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is difficult to put explicitly into words). Whether we are translators or not, we are all exposed to translations, everyone has some notion of what a translation is. In this sense, everyone has a view of translation – i.e. some kind of implicit theory. Whether trained or not, translators inevitably have some tacit translation theory of their own, such as a set of personal principles, or a favourite metaphor of translation (seeing translation *as* something), and some notion of what an acceptable translation is, as well as personal stylistic preferences. (In this sense at least, I agree that all translation must be influenced by *some* theory!) A translator's tacit theory might also include personal attitudes to norms, based on the experience of other translations and perhaps also an awareness of the feedback given to one's own or to other translations, e.g. in reviews or, in the case of crowdsourced translation (done usually online by a large group of people such as a community of fans, often voluntarily), by way of alternative translations proposed by other translators.

Here too there are problems. Mere exposure to translations will presumably not contribute to the formation of a tacit theory if the translations are not read as translations, and this is surely often the case. Reading your daily newspaper, do you normally take note of how much of the content is translated? Such a situation might of course lead to the tacit assumption that all acceptable translation is invisible. Perhaps people who themselves translate are more aware of the translations they read? I do not know of any research on this.

On the other hand, many of the translations we see are all too visible, in the sense that they are unnatural target language, or plainly inaccurate (if one compares them with the source texts). Since these highly visible translations continue to exist, indeed to multiply, maybe they become the new norm. In Finland, for instance, more and more subtitling is currently done by amateurs, unfortunately, as fees are cut and professionals boycott certain major employers. But what will be the effect of poor translations on the tacit theory of translation that is spreading through the next generation? We are often told these days that the reading matter of many young people is primarily subtitles – i.e. translations.

What kinds of personal principles and preferences might a tacit theory contain? Consider some examples from a pioneering study of the causal effects of (literary) translators' attitudes by Siobhan Brownlie (2003). Among the personal preferences she analyses are issues like the following, where opinions varied: whether or not to opt for literal translation; whether or not to respect sentence boundaries in the case of long source-text sentences; and whether a translation should be clearer and/or smoother than the original. Brownlie also discusses the possible discrepancy between what translators say their principles are and how they actually translate, under given conditions. She noted, for instance, that although the translators she studied disapproved of major semantic shifts, these were

nevertheless found in her data. And although there was agreement that unusual expressions should be reproduced, this was not always what happened. Opinions were divided as to whether the target text should be clearer than the source, but it very often was. There was also simplification in all the texts studied, although translators had different views on whether this was acceptable. Unnatural expressions were not favoured, but nevertheless found in the data.

Tacit theory, then, is formed by exposure to translations, and by popular ideas about translation. Sometimes even a particular metaphor of translation can affect practice. Recall the influence of the theoretical notion that literary translation can be seen as cannibalism, and how this has influenced translators especially in Brazil, far beyond any specific training programme; it has been widely seen as a way of encouraging translators to treat source texts with more creative freedom (see e.g. Vieira, 1994). Translation-as-cannibalism has been an idea that seems to have spread by osmosis, notably from the translations and writings of the brothers Haraldo and Augusto de Campos outwards, via imitations and discussions of many kinds. A theoretical idea like this can become part of the tacit knowledge of a whole professional community – or indeed a non-professional one too.

Tacit theory is also formed by the public discourse on translation (such as is manifested in book reviews, letters to the editor, statements of language or translation policy, interviews with translators, etc.). There may also be input from explicit descriptive theory, which is also part of the discourse of translation, but a rather special part, to which we now turn.

The descriptive paradox

In the history of Translation Studies, it is a commonplace observation that a major shift took place during the 1960s and 1970s, from a prescriptive approach to a descriptive one, as mentioned above. Descriptive Translation Studies became the new paradigm, aiming to study translations as they are, not as they should be. I will not expand here on the huge explosion of research that this paradigm has given rise to, but focus briefly on one problem, which will then be illustrated by my own experience. This is the problem of what I call the descriptive paradox: the idea that descriptive theory can affect practice. This has the curious consequence that when it does affect practice, the object being described is no longer exactly what it was before the description, because it will have changed as a result of the description. Compare the observer effect in physics, or the observer paradox in sociology, where the very act of observing or measuring something changes the state of the thing that is being observed.

In translation theory, one manifestation of this paradox derives from descriptive research on so-called translation universals, i.e. very general tendencies that appear in translations regardless of the language pair, culture, genre or historical period. (For a survey, see the papers in Mauranen and Kujamäki, 2004.) What might happen if one teaches students about some of these very general tendencies? I do not mean prescriptive teaching, but simply exposure to descriptive empirical theory. Would students' awareness of these features actually have the effect of changing their frequency of occurrence in subsequent translations done by these same students? Such a hypothesis was tested in Riitta Jääskeläinen's experiment (2004) on sensitizing students to the idea that translators tend to avoid repetition. She found that informing her students of this potential universal did have the effect that the students were less likely to follow it later: in other words, this descriptive information changed their practice. This is an example of the descriptive paradox. It suggests that merely teaching about universals might have the eventual effect of refuting the hypotheses about the very universals that are taught! This also implies that teaching the theory may end up changing not only the practice but eventually the theory itself, if theory seeks to describe practice.

I suppose that Jean Boase-Beier, whose argument set me thinking, assumes or hopes that her own

theoretical book (2011) will affect the translation practice of those who read it; indeed, perhaps it will improve their practice, by making them more sensitive to close readings, translation possibilities, and so on. So she is evidently hoping that her descriptive research will have a prescriptive effect: and this is the paradox.

A personal experience

I will now get personal. It has also been my own recent translation experience that has alerted me to the problem of the descriptive paradox. I have never been trained as a translator (apart from very basic courses in a BA degree in modern languages), and I have never been a professional translator. I have translated a couple of academic books, and a number of smaller assignments, but never translated for a living. However, I have spent a large part of my academic life teaching and studying translation and translation theory. When I recently came to translate my first literary work, from Finnish to English, I found myself wondering how my knowledge of translation theory would affect how I translated. When I started the project, I obviously had my own tacit theory, but it was not particularly unusual. I wanted to produce a translation that read well, in natural English. The translation did not need to sound Finnish, or foreignized. I aimed to respect sentence boundaries as far as possible, and also respect the various registers and voices of the original as much as I could. But how might my knowledge of descriptive theory affect how I translated?

The novel in question is Hannu Raittila's *Canal Grande*, written in Finnish in 2001, when it won the Finlandia prize for the best Finnish novel of the year. It is about a team of Finns who go to Venice as part of a Unesco mission to save the city from sinking: highly comical in parts, with an underlying seriousness. Apart from the fact that it is a fine novel, Hannu Raittila happens to be a friend of mine, which meant that I could occasionally consult him. Translating the novel was my initiative, and I have been paid something by the novel's Finnish publishers, who are still looking for an English publisher. A German translation by Stefan Moster was published in 2005, but there are no other translations available, as far as I know.

Let us look first at some of those so-called translation universals. One of the most studied universals concerns the general tendency for translators to explicitate, even when this is unnecessary (see e.g. Pápai, 2004). Consider the following examples from the novel and my translation. In (1) and (2) the parts in bold are added, as necessary explicitations.

(1) Miehet olivat ilmaantuneet viraston ovelle sumusta kuten hakkapeliitat Reinille...

> They had appeared out of the fog at the door of the office like the Finnish cavalry on the bank of the Rhine **during the Thirty Years' War**...

(2) Heikkilän mielestä italialaiset hiihtivät väärin. En uskonut, että suomalaisilla on vähään aikaan mitään sanomista kenenkään hiihtelyistä. (226)

> He thought the Italians skied in the wrong way. **In the light of recent events on the winter sports front back home** I didn't think Finns had anything much to say about anyone's skiing efforts at the moment.

In cases like these, I thought some extra information must be given to explain the reference, and so I went along willingly with the attested tendency to explicitate. Regarding (2): shortly before the novel was published there had been a huge doping scandal concerning the Finnish skiing team.

Research on explicitation has indicated that there tends to be rather less of the opposite strategy:

implication. The result can be that the translation ends up saying too much, underestimating the reader's ability to construct meaning. I aimed to explicitate when necessary, but also to implicitate sometimes when possible, as in (3), where the bold part has been omitted (represented by italics in the translation).

(3) Vene kiikahteli taas ja kuului lorinaa. Nyt kai puolestaan amerikkalainen kusi laidan yli **laguunin veteen**. (173)

> The boat rocked again, and there was another trickling sound. This time I guessed it was the American having a pee over the side [*into the water of the lagoon*].

Another general tendency is the way translations typically over-represent or under-represent items, in comparison with their distribution in non-translated texts in the same language. A study by Maeve Olohan and Mona Baker (2000), for instance, showed that reporting *that* was over-represented in English translations. So I went through my whole text: I was horrified to see how many unnecessary *that's* I had, and cut most of them out. In Finnish, the corresponding item *että* is compulsory, which of course helps to explain their overabundance in my first draft.

(4) Ylikomisario väitti, **että** häntäkin on pari kertaa ammuttu sorsana. (303)

> He said **Ø** he too had been shot at a couple of times by hunters taking him for a duck.

Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit (e.g. 2004) has suggested that translations tend to under-represent target items that are unique to the target language. By "unique items" she means target-language items for which there is nothing in the source language that is formally similar enough to trigger them as a direct equivalent. Translations into Finnish, for instance, tend to under-represent typical Finnish particles like *-kin*, *-hAn* and *-pA*, because most of the source languages studied lack corresponding items.

When the target language is English, I am aware that one of the "unique" forms that is often under-represented is the *-ing* form of the verb. So I added some.

(5) Ma rupesin olemaan aika hysterinen. Mä nauroin ja itkin. (328)

> I was getting pretty hysterical, laughing and crying. [*Rather than: I laughed and cried.*]

In one of the first large-scale empirical studies on possible universal tendencies, Sara Laviosa (Laviosa-Braithwaite 1996; see also her subsequent publications) found evidence of simplification, i.e. lower lexical density and variety, and more use of the most common words of the target language. I deliberately tried to compensate for this tendency by occasionally using rarer words than the source.

(6) Nyt pyhkii jonkun laivan valonheittäjä samaa avoveden pakkasilmaan nostamaa huurteista utuverhoa. (263)

> Now a ship's searchlight sweeps through the same frosty **shroud** [*instead of 'curtain'*] of mist raised into the freezing air by the open water.

(7) Saraspää **peiteltiin** takapenkin nurkkaan. (229)

> He sat **huddled** [*instead of 'was covered'*] under a blanket in the corner of the back seat.

Not all potential universals are tendencies that I felt I wanted to counter. The tendency to reduce

repetition, for instance, I willingly followed at some points.

(8) Lehtijutussa selitettiin, että se oli ollut "kosmopoliitti, kirjailija ja lehtimies, **arvostettu tyylintuntija**, [...]." Just. "Saraspää oli sukupolvensa johtava hahmo ja **arvostettu tyylintuntija**, Suomessa harvinainen jos kohta snobistinenkin intellektuellityyppi." (320)

> The article said he had been "a cosmopolitan, writer and journalist, an **esteemed connoisseur of style**, [...]." Yeah, right. "Saraspää was a leading figure of his generation and a **recognized aesthete** [rather than 'an esteemed connoisseur of style' again], an intellectual type that is rare in Finland, albeit verging on the snobbish."

The novel has very little direct speech but uses a great deal of free indirect discourse. Finnish is more lax than English about the acceptable sequences of tenses here, so there can be rather more ambiguity about whose voice is being heard. I was particularly aware of this problem around the time I was translating, as I was examining a theoretical PhD in Translation Studies on precisely this topic (Kuusi, 2011). Here, my theoretical knowledge may well have impinged directly on my translation, in terms of a heightened awareness of the problem and possible solutions. But I was sometimes aware that despite my efforts, the translation still lost some ambiguity. If the passage in (9) goes into the present tense, following the Finnish, the English sounds like Tuuli's voice, not the minister's.

(9) Se sanoi, että hän ei voi päättää mun puolesta mitään, mutta mitä tahansa mä teen, niin mä voin aina tulla kertomaan. Ihminen **yrittää** ratkaista vajavaisella kyvyllään, mikä **on** oikein ja väärin, mutta kaikkien ihmisen ratkaisujen tuolla puolella armo **on** ja **pysyy**. Ei sitä **ansaita**. (326)

> He [the minister] said he couldn't decide anything for me, but whatever I did, I could always come and tell him. People **tried** to work out what **was** right and wrong, with all their imperfections, but beyond all human decisions there **lay** mercy, which **was** always there. It **was** not something to be earned.

As to any personal principles I had: I felt free to add commas, but I also added many semi-colons, partly because the source text had practically none (semi-colons are rare in Finnish, but not so rare in English), but partly also because I am personally fond of them; so I allowed a personal preference to have some influence here. It would be *my* text, after all.

(10) Levitin veronalaisesta kirjakaupasta hankkimiani karttoja hotellihuoneen lattialle. (216)
[I spread out the maps, which I had bought from a Verona bookshop, on the floor of the hotel room.]

> I spread out the maps on the floor; I had bought them at a bookshop in Verona.

I have of course been aware of the increasing interest in translator agency in recent years (the ability of translators to act as social agents in their own right; see e.g. Kinnunen and Koskinen, 2010), and the debates about translation ethics. This awareness may have encouraged me to make corrections to the source text occasionally: for example, there are many instances of brief phrases in French or Italian, but some of them contain orthographic or grammatical slips, which I corrected. I was ethical enough, however, to check with the writer that I could do this. He even agreed to let me omit a non-existing Latin phrase completely, because I felt it did not fit with the cultured and educated image of the

character in question:

(11) [...] laguunin laivaliikenne on kokouksen aiheena ehdottomasti causa contradictio antagonis, sovittamattoman riidan aihe. (168)

> as far as the agenda is concerned, the ship traffic in the lagoon is an absolutely classic case of unresolvable dispute.

A couple of more general observations are worth adding here. First, a comment on the relevance of empathy. In much of my own published work, I have defended a general empirical methodology and not been so attracted to the hermeneutic approach to translation, which I have often found conceptually confusing and unhelpful. Now, however, I found myself leaning on hermeneutic notions like empathy, as a way of getting myself inside the voices of the characters. The novel is written in three voices: one narrator is a super-rational engineer, one is a decadent but cultured hedonist, and one is a street-wise young woman. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I found that I could identify both with the engineer and the hedonist, but much less so with the young woman. Her voice was much more difficult to articulate:

(12) Tänään se potkaisi ensimmäisen kerran. Tai mitä potkaisi? Ei ne potki, ne nykii. Niinkuin kalat, onkea tai verkkoa. Jossain näkymättömissä joku sätkähtelee ja nykii. Eikä se ensimmäistä kertaa tänään nykynt. Mä en vaan ollut tajunnut. Mistä minä tiesin miltä tuntuu, kun lapsi liikkuu? Nyt siitä ei ainakaan pääse eroon. Pienestä kiinni, niin pienestä on kiinni toisen elämä.

> Today it kicked for the first time. Yeah, well, kicked? They don't kick, they kinda twitch. Like fish, on a line or in a net. Somewhere invisible something jerks and twitches. And it wasn't the first time today. I just didn't realize before. How could I know what it feels like when a child moves? There's no getting away from it now, anyway. It hangs by a thread, like, such a thin thread, another life.

I grew particularly fond of the old hedonist, looking forward to his next section, and enjoying the expression of his voice. I even managed to slip in some Latin in one of his sections, to compensate for the earlier omission:

(13) Ilman Tuulin kielitaitoa emme olisi ikinä selvinneet sokkeloisten käytävien ja salien läpi määränpäähän, jonne ihme kyllä saavuimme käymättä lainkaan ulkoilmassa. (75)

> Without Tuuli's language skills we would never have found our way through the labyrinthine corridors and chambers to our destination, where we eventually arrived, mirabile dictu, without taking a single step outside.

One theoretical idea I have long been interested in is the equivalence hierarchy: sometimes semantic equivalence takes priority over formal, or stylistic, or pragmatic equivalence, for instance, whereas sometimes some other kind of equivalence is given priority. At one point, I decided that a particular lexical solution was so good that formal equivalence should be sacrificed: in (14) I restructured the sentence in order to fit in *bucking bronco*.

(14) Se heristi vihkoaan ja hihkasi innostuneena kuin cowboy, joka ratsastaa

rodeonäytöksessä villillä hevosella tai pukkihoikkia hyppivällä härällä. (235)
[... like a cowboy who rides in a rodeo show on a wild horse or a bucking bull]
> Brandishing his notebook, he was yelling with enthusiasm like a cowboy riding a bucking bronco or rodeo bull.

So in my personal case, I can find some evidence suggesting that my theoretical knowledge at least *may* have influenced my translation practice.

Concluding remarks

Marx famously wrote that although philosophers have sought to understand the world, the point is to change it. But in his essay "Imaginary Homelands", in the collection of that name, Salman Rushdie suggests that the distance between understanding and changing may not be so great. He notes that "description is a political act" (1992, 13). One always describes from a particular point of view, and often with a background ideology that colours the description and "spins" it in a certain direction, and the effect of this spin may be to change something, e.g. an attitude. Rushdie is writing about the descriptions of India by emigrant Indian writers, but the same point seems to apply to our descriptive paradox in Translation Studies, in the sense that descriptions have (or at least can have) effects. Indeed, Rushdie goes on to say that "the first step toward changing the world is describing it" (1992, 13). So if descriptive translation theory does really influence translators, we have the descriptive paradox.

But does descriptive theory have this effect, really? Maybe my own overt knowledge of theory had much less effect on me than I have suggested. I cannot prove such a causal relation in this particular case: I might have translated in the same way just on the basis of the tacit theory I have absorbed, or simply on instinct, or common sense. (Indeed, perhaps instinct is in fact an initial tacit theory.) How could one *prove* that an artist has been influenced directly by a theory? The challenge recalls the difficulties of finding empirical evidence for norms. In art, maybe we find some explicit evidence in a picture title, like the Turner example responding to Goethe's theory of colour. Or maybe there is biographical evidence, as we have in Constable's case. Or a picture may overtly illustrate the (playful) *rejection* of a theory, as in William Hogarth's *Satire on False Perspective*, for instance, designed to accompany a pamphlet on perspective, in 1754.⁸

With regard to translation, we can look for evidence in translators' prefaces and in their other paratextual reflections on their work, and in their biographies and social contexts. But evidence from these sources may not always be conclusive: I am not even sure how to interpret my own experience!

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⁸ Available e.g. at <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/william-hogarth/the-importance-of-knowing-perspective-absurd-perspectives>; last accessed 9.8.2013).

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