



# The Significance of Hypotheses

## L'importance des hypothèses en traductologie

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### Article abstract

The paper examines the idea that all research methodology is based on hypotheses of different kinds, both interpretive and empirical. Interpretive hypotheses (that something is usefully interpreted as something) can be tested pragmatically, but are not falsifiable; they underlie all empirical research. As an example of empirical hypotheses we focus first on the descriptive type, and in particular the literal translation hypothesis. This states that translators tend to proceed from more literal to less literal versions as they process a given text chunk. This hypothesis serves to illustrate the main criteria according to which any hypothesis can be claimed to be significant. These criteria are: explicitness, multiple testability, theoretical implications, applicability, surprise value, and explanatory power. Several other fairly well-known hypotheses in Translation Studies are also referred to.

# The Significance of Hypotheses

Andrew Chesterman

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Methodology is about ways of getting from A to B: *meta hodos* “along the way.” True, we might not have a very clear picture of destination B, but we want to get to some position of increased understanding. And all methodology has to do with hypotheses, of different kinds, about how to get to there. This is my opening claim, which I will try to substantiate. The claim can be made more specific as follows: all methodology starts with interpretive hypotheses, and may then proceed to empirical hypotheses. This implies that interpretive hypotheses are necessary conditions for the formation of any methodology.

What is an interpretive hypothesis? An interpretive hypothesis has the general form: X can be (usefully) interpreted as Y. The key term is *as*. It is a classic observation in hermeneutics that we understand anything by understanding it *as* something: we make some sense of the new or the complicated by seeing it in terms of something more familiar or more simple, *as* something familiar or simple. Light is seen as waves, or as particles, or indeed as both. A variant of “as” is “in terms of.”

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1 An earlier version of this paper, presented at a Finnish symposium in 2010, is to be found in the online series MikaEL, run by the Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters (see [www.sktl.net/mikael/](http://www.sktl.net/mikael/)). The literal translation hypothesis is similarly discussed in Chesterman, 2011.

An interpretive hypothesis is tested in use, pragmatically, as having more or less added value in furthering our understanding, generating empirical hypotheses, synthesizing existing knowledge, and so on. This important point is made by the Norwegian philosopher of science Dagfinn Føllesdal, who shows how the role of interpretive hypotheses, especially in the human sciences such as history or literary theory, is in many ways similar to the role played by hypotheses in the hypothetico-deductive methodology of the natural sciences (see Føllesdal, 1979; Chesterman, 2008). Interpretive hypotheses are testable against data, but they are not falsifiable; in this respect they differ from good empirical hypotheses. Interpretive hypotheses can be revised and rejected as necessary, just like empirical ones. We can always ask: how good is this interpretation? No research, empirical or otherwise, can avoid interpretive hypotheses. They are found at many levels in methodology: in formulating general perspectives (e.g., seeing translation as reported speech, or as cannibalism), in definitions and classifications, in operationalizations (we can measure quality as...), in interpreting results, and so on.

Another special feature of interpretive hypotheses is the way they can accumulate. We can entertain several at the same time, and explore numerous interpretations, all of which may have something to offer. New ways of seeing something do not necessarily banish old ones, but come to exist alongside them, adding depth of understanding.

Research projects in Translation Studies often either start with an *empirical* hypothesis which they set out to test, or aim to generate one based on argument and/or data analysis. Some of these hypotheses attract wider attention, and they are then subject to further testing, either in replication studies with similar data or in other kinds of conditions. These hypotheses are usually dignified by an easily citable name, with the definite article in English: “the X hypothesis.” Insofar as such hypotheses are widely corroborated, and appropriately refined and conditioned, they may eventually become part of the fundamental structure of a general theory of translation.

In the past two or three decades many interesting empirical hypotheses have been proposed and tested in connection with the search for translation universals. Examples are the explicitation hypothesis, the simplification hypothesis, and the unique items hypothesis (e.g., the articles collected in Mauranen and Kujamäki, 2004). These hypotheses make claims about very general features of translations as textual products, and obviously have implications concerning underlying cognitive processes. But there are also a few much debated hypotheses that make direct claims about the translation process itself, such as the literal translation hypothesis to be examined below.

Interpretive hypotheses, on the other hand, are not usually even called hypotheses in the literature, let alone attain the rank of being known as *the* something hypothesis. I wonder why. Perhaps because we spend more time on proposing them than on actually evaluating them?

### **A Closer Look at Interpretive Hypotheses**

Our first sight of potential data is bound to an initial interpretive hypothesis: that this “stuff” that we are observing or thinking about is something to be interpreted *as* data. This looks simple. But scholars only 50 years ago would have had a much narrower interpretation of what kind of “stuff” would count as data for translation research. Interpretations tend to change over time: we now include such data as questionnaire results and eye-movements, for instance.

“Data” is a plural noun, unlike “stuff.” In other words, data are (usually) seen as discrete units. We hope that our units will be natural categories, which “carve nature at the joints,” as Plato put it. But we may seldom reach such ideals. When we think we see a possible category or unit, we conceptualize it and give it a name. This gives us some concepts and some terms. But in both cases we are dealing again with interpretive hypotheses. We hypothesize that it is useful to carve out a given set of data as being sufficiently homogeneous to be reasonably distinguished from some other category, and we hypothesize that, for given reasons, a given term, rather than some other term, would be a useful way of referring

to this category so that we can make interesting generalizations. In so doing, we not only select the dataset we are interested in, we also define the category. The more we use quantitative methods, of course, the more important it is to have well-defined, explicit categories of countable units.

In Translation Studies we have some problems here—not to mention the additional problems of translating the terms we use into other languages. There is a long-running debate about the need (strongly felt by some scholars, but much less so by others) to standardize our terminology (cf. the special issue of *Target*, 19, 2, 2007). Especially problematic cases are our concepts of “translation strategy,” “translation type,” and indeed “translation” itself.

The first way to test the usefulness of interpretive hypotheses of categorization or definition is to link them explicitly to instances in the data. Data illustrate or exemplify concepts, and in this sense justify them. Even a single example will show that it is at least possible to apply the concept to the data. But even several examples will not suffice to prove that this concept is better than some competing one.

For instance, take Berman’s category of “great” or “canonical translations” (Berman, 1990). The idea is introduced during Berman’s discussion of the retranslation hypothesis. It applies to a translation in the last phase in a cycle of retranslation. After initial, freer and flawed translations, says Berman, eventually a canonical one will appear, which will halt the flow of retranslations. He gives some examples to illustrate this idea: Luther’s Bible, Schlegel’s Shakespeare, Chateaubriand’s Milton. All great translations are retranslations. Except, he adds, for some first translations that can also be great translations, if they do not age... which already makes his category rather problematic.

Then: test against different data, and different kinds of data. What happens when we try to apply Berman’s term to other data? Is any retranslation that appears to initiate a break in the cycle of retranslation automatically a member of this canonical category? And what about translations that have been seen to

be great but nevertheless have not stopped other translators from retranslating? Paavo Cajander's Finnish translations of Shakespeare's plays are acknowledged classics, dating from the 1880s. But Cajander's work did not halt the flow of retranslation, which still continues today. (There are also problems with the concept of retranslation itself, of course, which I will not go into here (see Paloposki and Koskinen, 2010).)

## **Descriptive Hypotheses**

Categorizations and descriptions are part of any description of course, and hence part of any empirical descriptive hypothesis. The basic form of a descriptive hypothesis can be given simply as follows: all instances of X have feature F. A descriptive hypothesis is thus a generalization, describing a pattern of some kind: a regular relation between X and F. (X may also be a single case, of course: a set of one.) Note that the definitions of X and F are all ultimately based on interpretive hypotheses.

Descriptive hypotheses are usually first proposed in an unconditioned, maximally general form. What then usually happens is that empirical tests begin to turn up evidence against the hypothesis in this form, so it needs to be modified into a conditioned form:

All X *of type T* have feature F

or: All X show feature F *under conditions ABC*

or: All X *have a tendency* (with probability P) to show feature F

An example: *Compared with the world population as a whole, American presidents are statistically more likely than expected to be left-handed.*

As mentioned above, research on so-called translation universals has turned up a number of interesting descriptive hypotheses, which are still being tested. So far, it seems that the unconditional forms of some of these hypotheses are not supported. The retranslation hypothesis (that later translations of a given text into a given target language tend to be closer to the original), for instance, does not seem to apply to drama translation, which seems to be determined by quite different

factors (e.g., Brisset, 1989). So these hypotheses need to be conditioned. It then becomes clear that our initial term “universal” is unfortunate, because its meaning in Translation Studies moves rather far away from its older meaning in language typology (language universals). It also seems clear that sometimes we waste time retesting unconditioned hypotheses that have already been falsified in this form; it would be better to develop plausible *conditioned* formulations and test these. Under what conditions, with what language pairs, or translation directions, or text types, or degree of professionalism, do we find that translators tend for instance to reduce repetition, or manifest more interference?

Research may also progress in the opposite direction. A conditioned descriptive hypothesis can be proposed for a restricted type of data, maybe even a single case, and then it is discovered that it also applies to other cases and thus has a more general scope. For instance, the use of more standardized language may not only be a tendency found in translations but also in normal second or foreign language performance, and perhaps under still other conditions where language use is unusually constrained in some way.

A good way of conditioning descriptive hypotheses is via correlations. Here are two examples from Toury’s well-known work. They all have the form: the more X, the more Y, or the more X, the more likely Y.

Translations are more standardized than their source texts >> The more peripheral the status of translation in a given culture, the more standardized translations tend to be. (Toury, 1995, p. 271)

Translations manifest interference >> There will tend to be more interference when translation is carried out from a high-prestige culture to a minor culture. (*ibid.*, p. 278)

The correlations thus express hypothesized conditional constraints on the generality of the underlying descriptive claim.

Good descriptive hypotheses can lead to predictive and explanatory ones. I will return to these later.

## **What Makes a Good Descriptive Hypothesis?**

A hypothesis is assessed at two stages. It is of course tested, and found to be supported or not supported by evidence. This may lead to adjustments in the way it is formulated or operationalized, and in both of these, interpretive hypotheses are of the essence. Take the explicitation hypothesis, for instance. There are several ways in which the notion itself has been defined, and several ways in which it has been operationalized and measured, so that it is virtually impossible to compare research results and replication becomes very difficult. Blum-Kulka's original operationalization was in terms of the addition of explicit markers of cohesion (1986), but many interpretations have been proposed since then (e.g., Klaudy, 1996; Englund Dimitrova, 2005; but see also Becher, 2010, for some provocative criticism).

One criterion of a good hypothesis would be that the interpretive debate has, for the time being at least, been settled, and we can concentrate on the empirical testing of the claim in question. In this respect, the explicitation hypothesis is perhaps not yet a good one, as we are still arguing about what it means. In other words, we have not yet succeeded in agreeing about how to make it adequately explicit.

But hypotheses are also assessed in terms of their significance; they are (more or less) *justified* in the first place, before even being tested. After all, some hypotheses are more important than others. A well-justified hypothesis will "make a difference" to the field, to theory or to practice—if it is then supported by evidence. A well-justified hypothesis might also cause a huge shift in the field if it turns out *not* to be supported, too.

There are several ways of justifying a hypothesis, and hence avoiding the risk of triviality. Let us examine some. In doing so, I will take one particular hypothesis as an example: the literal translation hypothesis. We will consider this question: is the literal translation hypothesis a good one, i.e., a significant one?



First criterion: the hypothesis is formulated explicitly enough in the first place (cf. the problematic explicitation hypothesis). My suggested formulation is as follows: *during the translation process, translators tend to proceed from more literal versions to less literal ones*. The underlying assumption is that the translator's cognitive processes will tend to be influenced, initially, by formal features of the source text. The hypothesis could also be stated in terms of a process of *deliteralization*, i.e., a move from more literal to less literal. In many respects—but not all—this hypothesis can serve as a good methodological (and indeed pedagogical) model in translation research.

The hypothesis itself is by no means a new idea, of course. Toury (1995, p. 191) already cites Ivir (1981, p. 58) on the idea that translators start from target versions that show formal correspondence, and then move on to freer versions when they need to in order to achieve a relevant equivalence. The rejection of the initial literal version is assumed to be made by some kind of cognitive monitor, and several scholars have proposed a “monitor model” to represent this (e.g., Tirkkonen-Condit, 2005).

Like any empirical hypothesis, its formulation requires a number of definitions and hence interpretive hypotheses. The main interpretive question is: what exactly do we mean by “literal”? The term “literal translation” is commonly applied both to a complete translation and to a local translation solution (strategy). Both these usages raise the problem of where exactly to draw the line between a literal translation and a non-literal one. I think we are dealing with a continuum here, not two distinct classes. If we interpret “literal” as “manifesting formal similarity with the source,” this allows the comparative formulation of the hypothesis mentioned above, in terms of a process that goes from more to less literal. We then need to define, for a given research project, how the degree of similarity is to be measured, which can easily be done in terms of the frequency of shifts of given kinds. And then we need to decide the scope of the hypothesis: are we talking about all text types, all translations, or just certain types?

So the hypothesis posits a move towards formally less similar forms, during the translation process. What is the

translation process? I interpret it here as covering the observable process (i.e., the translation event) which might begin with verbalized musings aloud, then go to initial written drafts, then further revisions during drafting, and then final revisions after drafting is complete, terminating when the translation is delivered to the client. This interpretation of course also assumes underlying *cognitive* processes that are not directly observable (the translation act, to use Toury's term (1995)).

If the formulation is explicit enough, the hypothesis can be tested empirically. If we operationalize the verb "tend" in the formulation above (e.g., to: in at least X% of subjects or cases studied), the hypothesis can be falsified. It is therefore vulnerable, which is a merit. As noted above, degrees of formal similarity can be operationalized in terms of the number and type of shifts. The most complex model of shift analysis so far proposed is that by Leuven-Zwart (1989, 1990), but simpler measures can also serve the purpose. For instance, one could count the frequency of calques in successive drafts.

Second, the hypothesis can be tested in several quite different ways. This is also a merit, partly because it makes the hypothesis more vulnerable (and possible multiple corroboration is correspondingly more meaningful, especially if different analyses can be triangulated), and partly because it indicates that the hypothesis may have relevance to different research frameworks and thus perhaps encapsulates a fairly general insight. The various ways of testing the hypothesis include the following (most of them are used or referred to in Englund Dimitrova, 2005):

- (1) Think-aloud protocols. Do translators verbalizations show movement away from more literal versions?
- (2) Keystroke logging analysis, such as Translog data.
- (3) Interim solutions analysis (the study of the revision process across a series of drafts). This was the context of Toury's reference to Ivir, cited above.
- (4) The study of repairs in simultaneous interpreting (cf. work referred to in Tirkkonen-Condit, 2005). Interpreters appear to use fewer repairs when there is more syntactic similarity between strings in the two languages, which suggests easier processing.

(5) The study of the time taken to translate different kinds of idioms, some of which have formally matching versions in the target language (and tend to be translated faster) and some of which do not (also discussed in Tirkkonen-Condit, 2005).

(6) The study of interference in general. Interference is of course a sign of some (usually) unwanted similarity that has been carried over from the source text into the target version.

(7) The study of differences between novice and professional or expert translators. A plausible corollary to the hypothesis would suggest that professionals and experts proceed more quickly, and further, along the path away from an initial literal translation; or that they actually start their processing from a less literal point (e.g., Englund Dimitrova, 2005).

(8) The study of translation performed under conditions of unusual time stress. One might expect that when processing time is strictly limited, more recourse is taken to literal versions, but research on this has so far been rather inconclusive (e.g., Jansen and Jakobsen, 2000).

A third important way of justifying a hypothesis is to show that it has theoretical implications. This criterion can be explained in terms of the various relations the hypothesis enters into with other hypotheses. For instance, it might be a counter-hypothesis to a competing claim. In the case of the literal translation hypothesis there is indeed a competing claim: the deverbalization hypothesis, proposed and assumed (but not empirically tested) by the so-called Paris school of interpreting, a claim implying the separation of form and meaning during processing. The deverbalization claim is that translators *start* from a deliteralized version. True, the deverbalization hypothesis was originally proposed for interpreting, but it has also been taken to apply to translation (e.g., Seleskovitch and Lederer, 1984). If the literal translation hypothesis holds good, any deverbalization would take place only after the initial literal phase, during later processing, drafting or revision.

There are also other conflicting arguments that make the literal translation hypothesis interesting. Nida's well-known river-crossing model of translation (e.g., 1964), comprising the three stages of analysis, transfer and restructuring, appears explicitly to

assume deverbalization, at least insofar as the formal structure of the source text is initially reformulated at what Nida calls a “near-kernel” level of abstraction. In Nida’s model, however, the initial deverbalizing move away from the source surface structure is represented as taking place within the source language, not the target language. Evidence in favour of the literal translation hypothesis would thus suggest some initial transfer to the target language *without* analysis, which would go against the model. Yet there might also be evidence of a move towards freer renderings during the restructuring process, which does take place within the target language. That said, it is clear that Nida’s model is not based on explicit empirical evidence, and was presumably intended to have pedagogical and prescriptive priorities, as indeed was the deverbalization idea. Nevertheless, the fact that the literal translation hypothesis stands in a dialectic relation with competing claims gives it a sharp theoretical relevance. It also has the rhetorical advantage of enabling scholars to formulate their discussions about it as a confrontational debate.

There are other kinds of possible relations with other hypotheses, apart from oppositional ones. A given hypothesis might be a sub-hypothesis of a more general one, and thus bring potential support to the latter. Two of the most general hypotheses that have so far been proposed are Toury’s “laws” I referred to above. The literal hypothesis seems to be a manifestation of the general interference hypothesis: it makes a more specific claim, about the relative degree of interference at different stages of the translation process (i.e., more at the initial stage of the translation of a given segment, then less later).

Or a given hypothesis might be a general one, which connects to a more specific one. Consider the relation between the literal translation hypothesis and the unique items hypothesis (e.g., Tirkkonen-Condit, 2004; Chesterman, 2007). This latter claims that items which are formally specific to a given target language tend to be under-represented in translations. The assumption is that translators find no direct trigger in the source text that would suggest the target-specific item; instead, they select the form that corresponds more closely to the source-text trigger. For instance, in German translations from English, the

hypothesis would claim that the frequency of target-language specific particles such as *doch* would be lower than expected, because it is unlikely that such particles would have formally similar “triggers” in the English source text. The particles are “unique items” in German, in comparison with English. In other words, the more literal version is chosen. True, the unique items hypothesis does not look at the initial choice, or the first draft, but at the final version. (I do not know whether it has been tested on interim solutions data.) But the two hypotheses seem to go hand in hand, and if both are supported they corroborate each other. Both would point to the effect of source interference, and both would go against the initial deverbilization idea.

The key point about all these kinds of relations is that they all contribute to creating networks of interlocking hypotheses. This is a good basis for the evolution of theories.

A significant hypothesis can also offer applications to different kinds of research goals. In other words, it is fruitful, productive. It might offer a solution to a significant practical or social problem, or to different theoretical or research problems. In the case of our example, the literal hypothesis has interesting potential applications in the description and explanation of individual translator styles, and perhaps in the optimization of revision procedures (e.g., Mossop, 2007). There may be more than one tendency at work: some translators, under certain conditions, may tend to process in a *deliteralizing* direction, from more literal towards less literal, while others work in the opposite direction, beginning with a freer version and then pulling it back closer to the source text during processing or revision (i.e., *literalizing*).

This suggests that our hypothesis can generate additional research questions and research problems: under what conditions do translators tend to deliteralize, and under what conditions do they tend to literalize, reverting to forms that are closer to the source? Do these conditions have to do with personality? Translator style? Text type? Language pair and/or direction? Length of professional experience? Desired translation quality? How then could we use this information in order to improve

procedures of self-revision and other-revision? The hypothesis thus also has practical implications.

Our next criterion is surprise value. A bold hypothesis that is corroborated is extremely interesting: suppose it turned out that left-handed presidents (or translators) tended to be better (on some measure) than right-handed ones! The field would also be interestingly disturbed if it turns out that some cautious (plausible) hypothesis is *not* supported. In this latter case, we might first suspect the testing procedure itself. But we might also be forced to reconsider cherished assumptions that actually do not hold. For instance: that all amateur translations are of lower quality than professional ones; that fan translations are universally terrible; or that translations always improve if translators are given more time.

In this respect, the literal translation hypothesis is less impressive. Because it appears to be highly plausible, it is a rather cautious hypothesis, not a bold one. Research results that went against it would rather surprise us. True, bolder, and potentially more interesting sub-hypotheses might eventually emerge when we know more about the specific conditions under which a processing move from more to less literal tends to occur, and when it tends not to occur.

We can now add one more central criterion, perhaps the most important of all: the hypothesis has explanatory power. This takes us beyond description into explanation.

## **Explanation and Prediction**

The fundamental goal of any research is to explain or understand something. One basic sense of explanation is the causal sense: we explain the occurrence of X by saying that it has been caused by Y. In translation, Y would include both external factors like the languages involved, the *skopos*, the working conditions, and also the translator's agency, know-how, subjectivity, moods and so on. But there are also other ways of explaining. Generalizations themselves are also a kind of explanation: they show that the explanandum is not an isolated phenomenon, but behaves like

others of the same kind. In this way, a generalization about X helps us to make some sense of X, to understand it better (cf. Croft, 1990). A law, such as Toury's laws mentioned above, is in fact a universal generalization. One can also explain by colligating generalizations and/or observations under a single governing principle, as Darwin did with the notion of natural selection. Salmon (1998) calls this explaining by unification. Showing how a phenomenon fits into a wider context or nexus of relations is also a kind of explanation, because doing this also helps us to make sense of it (e.g., the model used in Koskinen, 2008).

Some would argue that the causal type of explanation is the basic one, and that the other types are either implicitly (weakly) causal or not really explanations at all. I prefer a broader concept of what can constitute an explanation, and include them all (which is another interpretive hypothesis, note!). What all explanatory hypotheses have in common is the fact that they propose different kinds of relations between the explanandum X and something else, so that X is shown not to be a totally isolated phenomenon. This further illustrates the significance of hypotheses that relate in some way to other hypotheses: it is one way of increasing their explanatory power. And it also illustrates the explanatory role played by interpretive hypotheses, for relations are also things that can be interpreted. The explanatory power of a hypothesis is thus an expression of its ability to *make sense*, in some way, of the explanandum X.

Let's take a couple of examples. I have suggested above that Toury's two laws are not only descriptive but also explanatory, in the sense that (if they hold good) they "make sense of" many observations of interference or standardization. That is to say: if they are indeed general laws, it is not surprising that they also describe what this translator did, and that one, and that one. But we can go a step further. Might there be some other principle, more general than these laws, which would make sense of the laws themselves, by relating them? Pym (2008) makes just such a suggestion. He argues that both laws could themselves be explained by the notion of risk-avoidance. Translators have an in-built desire to avoid risk, says Pym, and they do this both via exploiting interference and via standardizing. Pym's explanatory

hypothesis looks like a unificatory one, but it also has a causal sense. The posited cause is situated within the translator's sociopsychological attitude, or habitus, which may itself partly be the result of training.

My second example comes closer to our literal translation hypothesis. Halverson's hypothesis of gravitational pull focuses on how target-language category prototypes and superordinate conceptual schemata tend to influence the translator's choices, leading to the over-representation of certain kinds of items (Halverson, 2003, 2007). This cognitive pull, she argues, explains such putative translation universals as simplification and generalization. But underlying this idea there is obviously the assumption that salient source-text features will also exert a pull (i.e., leading to interference of some kind, and hence evidence for the literal translation hypothesis). In her discussion of the unique items hypothesis, Halverson makes this point explicitly (e.g., 2003, p. 223). In the absence of any conceptual overlap between source and target structures, it is only to be expected that target-language-unique forms will be under-represented. In other words, if there is a choice between a target structure that is formally similar (and hence cognitively salient at the moment of target-item selection) and one that is not, the translator will tend to select—at least initially—the formally similar one and thus save processing time and effort. Halverson also makes the important point that similar effects have been observed in studies on second language acquisition. This implies that so-called translation universals may not be specific to translation, but have to do more generally with language use under particular constraints.

Halverson's hypothesis thus situates its causal trigger not in the translators' attitudes but in their cognition. Attitudes are more accessible to consciousness than cognition. Indeed, cognition might underlie attitudes. So we are dealing here with a different level of causal explanation, which is not necessarily in conflict with the risk-avoidance idea but might complement it. Both these explanatory hypotheses propose an explanation by linking descriptive textual phenomena with other phenomena of a different kind, not textual but attitudinal or cognitive. An explanation that makes this kind of connection is more



powerful—because more general—than one that remains within the field of the explanandum itself.

Halverson actually takes this step twice: first by extending the hypothesis beyond Translation Studies into Second Language Acquisition Studies, and then by the appeal to cognitive processes. Pym's risk-avoidance hypothesis also looks outward beyond translation to intercultural cooperation in general, and the social risks of non-cooperation.

*Predictive* hypotheses are sometimes simply formulations for testing explanatory ones. If X is explained as being caused by conditions ABC, one can test this claim by predicting that whenever conditions ABC hold, X will occur (with probability P). But the relation between explanatory and predictive hypotheses is not always so evident. Explanations are easier to make than predictions; one can explain (in hindsight) more than one can predict. Descriptive hypotheses also have a built-in relation to predictive ones. The descriptive claim made by the literal translation hypothesis leads easily to a predictive formulation: under conditions ABC, translators will tend to first consider/write/verbalize more literal versions and then deliteralize them.

Predictive hypotheses are also implicit in methodologies that are designed to elicit data, not just analyse it, such as interviews and questionnaires, for instance, or TAP methods. The predictions are that these methods will produce interesting and relevant data. The status of such predictions as hypotheses is illustrated by arguments about the usefulness of the data thus elicited. It is also worth recalling that implicit predictive hypotheses underlie all prescriptive statements ("you should do this" = "if you do this the reader will be pleased," for instance) and proposed solutions to problems (if this problem occurs, do this and the problem will be solved).

So what kind of explanatory power does the literal translation hypothesis have? Well, it certainly unifies a number of different kinds of observations under a single idea. And it links with several other hypotheses, in different ways. And although it is overtly a descriptive claim, it is based on assumptions about

underlying cognitive processing, on the influence of linguistic form on semantic processing. It would be interesting to explore the extent to which these assumptions could also explain second language acquisition data, or features of text composition by bilinguals writing in their weaker language, or natural translations done by untrained bilingual children. This would be the next step: to extend the reach of the hypothesis in order to connect with other fields, and thus stretch and test its explanatory power. The more relations of different kinds a hypothesis allows us to establish, the more explanatory power it has.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The oldest research methods in TS have been conceptual analysis and comparative textual analysis. Conceptual analysis is basically the generation and assessment of interpretive hypotheses, although this is seldom explicitly acknowledged. In TS this has sometimes taken place at some distance from the data, however, and applications have often been difficult, especially on new data. (Note the debate about what is meant by foreignization, for instance, and about the difficulty of applying this concept consistently.) Citations of other people's interpretive hypotheses usually take the form of citing definitions, or particular wordings; or by adopting a previously proposed classification. The hypothetical nature of these cited claims or assumptions is often overlooked. Such discussions typically suggest new metaphors and ways of seeing, but it is not always clear what advantage might thus be gained over some other way of seeing, some other "*as*." New interpretive hypotheses are often proposed, but less often tested beyond a possible exemplification or two.

Text analysis, on the other hand, is an empirical endeavour that is mainly descriptive. But we now have many more kinds of translation data than earlier—not just textual—and a great many hypotheses. One problem here seems to be that we repeatedly test the same hypotheses in an unconditioned, absolute form, when they have long been shown to be false in that form. Perhaps we should give up the term "universals," for instance, and prefer formulations of claims that are precisely conditioned, not absolute. That would mean adjusting the level of generalization

we are aiming at. At the same time, we need to develop bold general hypotheses that offer greater explanatory power (such as Pym's risk-avoidance idea), and find ways of operationalizing and testing them.

All kinds of hypotheses matter, then, in our search for greater understanding. But let us not forget to test them, and above all to evaluate their significance. The biggest research question of all is always the hardest one: *so what?* Some hypotheses do matter more than others.

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**ABSTRACT: The Significance of Hypotheses** —The paper examines the idea that all research methodology is based on hypotheses of different kinds, both interpretive and empirical. Interpretive hypotheses (that something is usefully interpreted *as* something) can be tested pragmatically, but are not falsifiable; they underlie all empirical research. As an example of empirical hypotheses we focus first on the descriptive type, and in particular the literal translation hypothesis. This states that translators tend to proceed from more literal to less literal versions as they process a given text chunk. This hypothesis serves to illustrate the main criteria according to which any hypothesis can be claimed to be significant. These criteria are: explicitness, multiple testability, theoretical implications, applicability, surprise value, and explanatory power. Several other fairly well-known hypotheses in Translation Studies are also referred to.

**RÉSUMÉ : L'importance des hypothèses en traductologie** — Cet article examine l'idée que toute méthodologie se base sur des hypothèses, que ces dernières soient interprétatives ou descriptives. On peut soumettre les hypothèses interprétatives (où l'on considère qu'un phénomène donné peut être utilement

interprété comme quelque chose) à des tests pragmatiques, mais elles ne sont pas falsifiables; ces hypothèses soutiennent toute recherche empirique. A titre d'exemple d'hypothèses empiriques, nous prenons d'abord le type descriptif, plus particulièrement l'hypothèse de traduction littérale. Selon celle-ci, les traducteurs ont tendance à passer d'une version plus littérale à une version moins littérale lors du maniement d'un segment de texte. Nous nous servons de cette hypothèse pour illustrer les critères principaux selon lesquels n'importe quelle hypothèse peut s'avérer signifiante. Les critères sont : leur nature explicite, une testabilité multiple, leurs implications théoriques, leurs applications, leur valeur de surprise et leur puissance explicative. Nous faisons référence aussi à d'autres hypothèses assez connues en traductologie.

**Keywords:** methodology, hypothesis, literal translation, explanation, justification

**Mots-clés :** méthodologie, hypothèse, traduction littérale, explication, justification

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