

A review of Douglas Robinson, *Translation and the Problem of Sway*.  
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The main purpose of Douglas Robinson's book is to discuss the concept of *translational sway* by critically evaluating Venuti's adaptation of Peirce's concept of the interpretant and Baker's adaptation of narrative theory. The author also puts forward "a 'new' and potentially revolutionary paradigm" (ix): the *somatics* of translation, i.e. how decisions of translation agents (translator, editor, researcher) are guided by "shared evaluative effect" (ix).

The book is divided into 6 chapters, with the first five chapters focusing on building a consistent theory starting from an article by Venuti (2008) and the final chapter discussing Baker's narrative theory (2006). The author explains this imbalance by the fact that, while conducting the analysis, the two theories seemed to lead to discussions on the same issues regarding translational sway.

In chapter 1, "Introduction: Translation and sway", the author discusses norms and translator bias, considering they are both forms of translational sway. Douglas Robinson starts his discussion on the concept of "sway" from Ori and Rom Brafman (2008), who defined it as "a purely irrational force emerging out of emotional response, tiredness or other sources of rational deficits or group pressures" (x). They also identified 6 different channels of sway or "forces" that may influence the translator and therefore give a different shape to the translation (7): loss-aversion, commitment, value-attribution, altruism/ selfishness, the chameleon effect and fairness. When discussing mistranslations from the Bible, Douglas Robinson draws the conclusion that they were either the product of censorship, coming out of pressure from social taboos, or the product of the Christian doctrine, with specific reference to the virgin birth. The author criticizes Brafmans' point of view on sway, calling it a "simplistic notion" (8), and considers that closer attention should be given to the cognitive and affective processes of translation. Unlike Brafmans, who consider sway is a disruption of rationality, Robinson puts forward the idea that sway is a source of rationality, "a primary collective channel for the successful and effective organization of thought" (9).

When discussing norms, Robinson places them in the middle between explicit rules and "fully subjective idiosyncracies" and defines them as "general values or ideas shared by a certain community as to what is right and wrong, adequate and inadequate" (11). In other words, translators sway between approval (of what is correct, successful, appropriate) and disapproval (of what is incorrect, inappropriate, misleading, awkward or perverse), as part of the larger group dynamic.

Douglas Robinson chooses to focus on two theoretical constructs, Venuti's interpretant and Baker's narrativity, coming from two directions of study – semiotics and literary studies, because they are both channels of sway, "ideological guides to interpretation" (13). What is more, the author considers they are complementary points of view: Venuti's utopian thinking goes very well with Baker's pessimism about the prospects of change.

Chapter 2, "Lawrence Venuti on the interpretant", brings to the front the discussion about the interpretant, "a pattern of use in a cultural practice that is performed and regulated within a social institution" (25, quote from Eco 1979: 32).

Robinson follows the line of thought of both Eco and Venuti, drawing the conclusion that for Eco “translation itself can be an interpretant”, while for Venuti “translation is a metalanguage that is governed (or swayed) by the interpretant” (25). What these definitions have in common is the fact they are revisions of Peirce’s concept of interpretant, all of them leading to the idea that translating is a macro speech act that human beings use to do things with words.

Starting from the interpretant triad put forward by Peirce – emotional, energetic and logical – Robinson considers that interpretants are “individualized agents of collective regulatory power” (36) and they are those who sway the speech act of translation. Thus, the author puts forward the phenomenology of *submission* to collective guidance (“ideosomatics”) and the phenomenology of *deviation* from collective guidance (“idiosomatics”), which draw attention to *how it feels to live in the body* (36-37). Robinson calls this phenomenology “the somatics of translation” and, essentially, it is about the body-becoming-mind: the emotional interpretant develops an interpretation, the energetic interpretant does something that will clarify the emotional response and eventually the logical interpretant will turn certain interpretive solutions into habits. Thus, the author suggests that the interpretant acts as a “habitualized channel of social sway to the actor, whether the translator or the translation reader/critic” (38).

Chapter 3, “The case of Alex. Matson”, is a close analysis of the work of a Finnish writer and translator, with special focus on his translations into Finnish of Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Faulkner’s *Wild Palms* and *As I Lay Dying*. This is only the starting point, since Robinson is interested in expanding the model of interpretant in order to incorporate rhetorical situation. The author adds to the two types suggested by Venuti (*thematic* and *formal* interpretant) a third type, the *rhetorical* interpretant, “an affective channel of sway that is reticulated through a group” (89). Robinson goes even further and suggests a combination between Peirce’s interpretant triad and Aristotle’s modes of persuasion. Thus, the rhetorical interpretant may be divided into an *ethical* interpretant (controlling the perception of characters), a *pathetic* interpretant (shaping the meaning) and a *logical* interpretant (controlling the structure of what is said or written).

In Chapter 4, “The spatiotemporal dynamic of foreignization”, Douglas Robinson goes back to close analysis of specific translations and discusses foreignism on the basis of Alex. Matson’s translations. The author’s concern is best described in two research questions: (1) What happens when the translator reads the source text and begins imagining turning it into the target language? (2) What happens when the target reader reads the translation? (121) The main idea developed in this chapter is that there are various degrees of “own” and “alien” language depending on the reader’s linguistic and cultural “body politic”. The translator needs to reimagine and reformulate the source text in terms of the “body politic” of the target culture, acting thus as a mediator between two bodies: the source-cultural body and the target-cultural body. At the level of the reader, something else happens: “(s)he must assimilate the new into the old, the strange into the familiar, the alien into the own” (129).

Chapter 5, “Translating Dostoevsky, theorizing translation”, is a case study of two English translations of Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*. After a careful and detailed analysis of Dostoevsky’s style (5.2.3. Colloquialism, 5.2.4. Polyphonic Dostoevsky), Robinson moves into the theory of translation, adding two more interpretants to the existing types: *axiological* and (*meta*)*formal*. At the axiological level, the translation is

evaluated by the target audience, at the metaformal level, the theorist is under scrutiny. The point made by Robinson at the end of the chapter is that each translation is influenced by the translator's "shared evaluative affects" (158): one may favour naturalization while another one – foreignism: both of them do this in order to convert readers to his/ her set of deeply held values.

In Chapter 6, "Mona Baker on narratives", Douglas Robinson discusses the narrative paradigm and its relationship to the study of translation. Robinson points out that narrativity is "one of many affective-becoming-cognitive processes guided or swayed by interpretants" (166) together with dialogue, rhetorical identification, performance, kinaesthetic metaphorization and the network.

In *Translation and the Problem of Sway*, Douglas Robinson succeeds in grasping the diversity of the concept of sway, discussing both the traditional views of error and bias, or as the influence of the source author, source text or source culture, or ideologically as a "collection of cultural habits channelled through interpretants and narratives" (189). Robinson's theoretical study on translational sway opens paths for further research and puts forward an analysis in which scholars and practitioners of communication and social interaction may take real interest.

## References

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