# COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVES
# IN POLISH TRANSLATION STUDIES TODAY

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> To interpret, to reconstruct, to redescribe, to question –
> this is what the translator also does.
> Adam Phillips, psychoanalyst

In Poland (as nearly everywhere else) research carried out within the discipline defined as Translation Studies (TS) has been traditionally divided into 'the literary' and 'the linguistic'. The linguistic branch has been both underestimated and underrepresented. Pre-structuralist theories of language did not offer any coherent framework such as might be applicable to translation, and structuralist linguistics – after a brief period of fascination with formal rigours and the alluring predictability of the model – soon proved inadequate as tools enabling researches to deal with even the most basic issues. The inadequacy made many scholars reject all linguistically based approaches.

Polish contrastive linguistics, developed within numerous international projects in which Polish linguists participated during the last few decades of the 20th century, only rarely address translation directly. In the illustrative material that showed languages in contrast and which was usually provided by the linguists themselves, the crucial problem of translational equivalence was, in general, simply taken for granted. Among the few instances of deeper reflection on the subject, one might mention the, by now classic, paper by Tomasz P. Krzeszowski, a prominent Polish linguist and translator.[1]

In view of the present author's professional orientation, and as a plea for the recognition of the role that contemporary linguistics could play in TS, this essay will focus upon the linguistic branch of translation theory. More specifically, emphasis will be put upon the interface between TS and cognitive theories of language. More specifically still, while acknowledging the ambiguity of the term (viz., e.g. the cognitivism of Chomsky and his genera-

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[1] T. P. Krzeszowski, *Equivalence, congruence and deep structure*, in *Papers in Contrastive Linguistics*, ed. by G. Nickel, Cambridge, Cambridge Uuniv. Press, 1971, pp. 37-48.

tive-transformational model), and of the development of research falling within the category of cognitive sciences (viz. neurolinguistics or connectionism), the following discussion will be limited to what is known under the umbrella term of Cognitive Linguistics (CL).

Recent developments in the CL branch of theoretical linguistics are clearly paralleled by 'anti-structuralist' or – more positively – 'post-structuralist' shifts in contemporary TS. Among the main tendencies there is a  focus on translation as a process rather than a product, with the resulting shift from the description of the product to the explanation of the process, as well as growing recognition of the significance of the 'human factor', or the translator's identity. As the result, the myth of the translator's invisibility has been abolished, and their identity recognized. The changing attitude has important consequences. The inherent subjectivity of translation – considered as both the process and the product – was admitted, and translation has come to be seen as a dynamic activity, with focus on the translator's decision making processes. As was convincingly demonstrated in a recently published ground-breaking book which announces wider recognition of possible cross-feeding interactions between TS and CL, for both disciplines the time has come to assume the central role of human experience and understanding.[2] Most importantly, both disciplines have now reached the same fundamental consensus: every product of verbal activity – either an original discourse or a translation – is a subjective approximation rather than an objective reconstruction of reality. Our perception of the world is filtered by individual knowledge and experience and determined by particular social and cultural conditions in which this reality is perceived. If those premises are accepted, the cognitive, and cognitivist, perspective becomes a natural consequence.

Looking for evidence of cognitive thinking in today's TS one has to be aware of the fact that many of the tenets, assumptions and principles were actually present in traditional Polish linguistics as professed by such eminent scholars as Jan Baudoin de Courtenay, Jan Rozwadowski, Zenon Klemensiewicz, or Stanisław Jodłowski.[3] At this point, however, we shall concentrate upon those among the Polish linguists whose ideas directly pertain to translation and translation theory as forerunners of the cognitive perspective. An

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[2] *Cognitive Linguistics and Translation. Advances in Some Theoretical Models and Applications*, ed. by A. Rojo, I. Ibarretxe-Antuñano, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter Mouton, 2013, esp. the editors' *Introduction*, pp. 18-26.

[3] For a comprehensive survey of their contribution, see S. Urbańczyk, *Dwieście lat polskiego językoznawstwa (1751-1950)* (Two hundred years of Polish linguistics [1751-1950]), Kraków, Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1993.

interested reader may be referred to the literature;[4] here it must suffice to re-call, for instance, that Bronisław Malinowski, a field linguist and anthropologist who may well deserve to be called the founding father of contemporary Polish ethnolinguistics, claimed – and demonstrated by presenting rich empirical data – that language is an element of culture and thus should be analyzed within a broad cultural context. In consequence, he wrote, the unit of translation should be considered as an entire context-bound text. Zenon Klemensiewicz, recognized as one of the most prominent Polish linguists of his time, anticipated Eugene Nida's later notion of functional equivalence by postulating a shift from fidelity as a criterion of good translation to its adequacy, and by defining the role of the translator as co-creative (*współtwórcza*) rather than merely re-creative (*odtwórcza*) or text-processing (*przetwórcza*). The last of this triad, the linguist and translator Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, is an author of an introduction to translation theory which has survived for more than-half century without losing any of its topicality. For Wojtasiewicz, what matters in theoretical reflection on translation is the translation process leading to the creation of a product, and what is needed for a translator to carry this process out successfully is his mental equipment, which Wojtasiewicz defines as "the same set of associations", which a good translator is supposed to share with his author.

This early thought on what was not yet called "Translation Studies" paved the way for further developments. Since 'traditional linguistics' was always more popular among Polish linguists than highly formalized structuralism, and transformational grammar in particular, new trends in linguistic theories met with understanding and sympathy. New perspectives were opened for TS scholars looking for a more user-friendly linguistic framework for their research.

The advance of linguistic cognitivism in translation (theory) means rejecting the old assumption that translation is an 'operation on texts' or an 'operation on languages', which was the cornerstone of structuralist theories as advocated by contrastive linguists of the structuralist persuasion. Instead, translation came to be seen as an operation on minds. In agreement with the general model of the process of cognition, transfer from one text to another

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[4] B. Malinowski, *Tłumaczenie słów nieprzetłumaczalnych* (On translating untranslatable words [1935]), *Polska Myśl Przekładoznawcza. Antologia*, ed. by P. Bukowski and M. Heydel, Kraków, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2009, pp. 39-52; Z. Klemensiewicz, *Przekład jako zagadnienie językoznawstwa* (Translation as a task for linguistics [1954]), Ibidem, pp. 53-66; Z. Wojtasiewicz, *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia* (An introduction to translation theory [1957]), Warszawa, TEPiS, 1992.

(e.g. in a different language) is mediated by the crucial process of concept-making, or conceptualization. This can be represented as a chain of consecutive phases,[5] beginning with the perception by the original author of what is meant to constitute the content of their text, and ending with the expression of the translator's conceptualization thereof: 1. perception (of [virtual] reality); 2. conceptualization; 3. expression; 4. perception (of [virtual] reality as represented in the original); 5. conceptualization; 6. expression.

The difference between this schema and its well known structuralism-based predecessors consists in that the process of translation is now mediated by the crucial phases of mental representation, which requires relating phase (2) to phase (5) rather than (3) to (6). The reality perceived can be either the surrounding world, or what theory of literature calls "a represented world" – the reality created (and perceived as such) by the human mind.

Seeing translation as an interplay between two conceptualizations involves comparing what CL defines as *construals*. The idea of a construal is crucial to CL, or strictly speaking, to Cognitive Grammar. It pertains to the way that a user of language chooses to express the conceptual representation of a *scene*, which in its turn is defined as a 'portion' of their perception of the (virtual) reality that they intend to refer to. The choice is made from among the resources of a given language. In other words, construal is a specific linguistic organization of a scene. CL defines alternate construals of scenes in terms of what is defined as *focal adjustments*, that is variations pertaining to individual *dimensions of imagery*. The first of these is *scope*, that is, the selection of particular elements and aspects that the scene is perceived to include, or the object of conceptualization. Then there comes *focus*, that is, the structure resulting from the speaker's decision as to what elements of the expression should be highlighted and what should be hidden – the standard example is the opposition between using the active or the passive voice in order to either focus upon the agent of an action or to reduce the salience of agency. Another dimension of imagery is *specificity*, which  pertains to the level of accuracy – or granularity – of the description. Finally, there is *perspective*, that is the particular point of view – literal or abstract – from which the scene is being depicted. All these aspects of scene construal find their linguistic (lexical of grammatical) exponents, and the choice of particular dimensions naturally influences conceptual representations evoked in the mind of the receiver (of either the original or of the translation). Detailed descriptions and analyses of scene construals and their linguistic embodi-

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[5] This is, of  course, a gross simplification: as psychologists and neurologists teach us, the phases may – and do – overlap; cf. parallel processing.

ments in different languages may be found in the copious literature of the subject, to which we refer the interested reader.[6]

In view of TS, two aspects of the cognitive model of language seem particularly significant. First, the notion of construal can easily be modified to involve selection that is made not within an individual language but across different languages. Second, the interactive bias of the CL model may help to develop in TS the aspect that has been traditionally recognized in literary theory as reception, but which was, regretfully, rather neglected by TS scholars working within linguistic paradigms.

It is clear that the adoption of the cognitivist stance requires further redefinition of the crucial – and notoriously controversial – notion of equivalence in translation. Notably, one of the prominent theorists of translation actually rejects it, claiming that perfect equivalence would in fact imply identity, whereby the perfect translation of a text could only be that text itself.[7] Taking the cognitivist position means replacing the old equivalence of expressions with a more realistic concept of 'equivalence of experience', which leads to correspondences between the author's, the translator's and the reader's conceptualizations (mental images). The opposite, that is 'lack of equivalence', will now be considered to result from shifts of construals, that is dissimilar ways in which mental images are represented by means of particular linguistic structures and expressions.

From the very beginning, in CL two paths of development have been running parallel, departing at some points and meeting at others. The development of a cognitive theory of language and grammar was paralleled by the development of a theory embracing one of the basic phenomena of human thought, that is metaphor. The cognitive theory of metaphor, based on the same fundamental cognitive assumptions as cognitive grammar, claims that metaphor takes root in the most basic, physical experience of man, and that its main purpose is to tame the unknown reality that surrounds people by comparing it to, and referring to it with, notions that are already well known. What naturally followed, was the conviction that basic metaphors would make use of basic experience, common to mankind, irrespective of time and place. Thus, while the most general, basic cognitive metaphors (cf. the classic *life is a journey*) might be expected to display a considerable amount of universality, more detailed ones which are derived from them would be more

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[6] For a recent survey by one of the founding fathers of CL, see R. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar. An Introduction*. Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 2008.

[7] T. Hermans, *Translation, Equivalence and Intertextuality*, "Wasafiri", 18:40 (2003), pp. 39-41.

or less culture-bound, in proportion to the level of their specificity (cf. the culture-bound specific metaphor *life is surfing* [so don't be afraid of the waves]).[8] The significance of this for TS is immediately apparent.

Rudiments of a translation theory based on Cognitive Linguistics (in respect of both cognitive grammar and the cognitive theory of metaphor) were outlined in a monograph written by the present author and first published 20 years ago.[9] The monograph presents the main tenets of cognitive linguistics, and the dimensions of imagery in particular, with emphasis on their applicability to a linguistic framework for a translation theory. Extracts form literary texts (Polish and English originals juxtaposed to their respective translations) were analysed, with the analyses illustrating scope, focus, specificity and perspective as main points of reference. One of the analyses demonstrates crucial problems involved in translating metaphor, which are discussed in terms of the cognitive theory. The last chapter of the study sums up its theoretical implications.

Nearly three decades later, in 2010, a rather long paper authored by a Polish cognitive linguist Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk[10] was published, postulating the concept of *re-conceptualization* as a basis of a cognitivist theory of translation. In the same vein as Tabakowska's monograph mentioned above, the article takes as the starting point some basic tenets of CL: reception of a linguistic expression depends on language users' mental models, and scene construal significantly contributes to meaning. Most importantly, the author considers meaning in translation as dynamic: constructed and emergent as the discourse progresses. Using a corpus of literary texts, she offers a typology of re-conceptualizations, listing as many as 35 types. Although most of these have been well known and are actually discussed in a fairly traditional way (viz. proper names, forms of address or the so-called realia), thus departing from cognitivist methodology, the paper does convince the reader that CL could indeed make relevant contributions to TS, and in particular to a translation theory, understood as "a system of ideas and statements explaining something" (OED). This potential was critically evaluated in a book which is a significant landmark on the Polish way towards a trans-

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[8] For detailed discussion, see e.g. the classical monograph by G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *Metaphors we Live By*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008 [1980].

[9] E. Tabakowska, *Cognitive Linguistics and Poetics of Translation*, Tubingen, Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993.

[10] B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, *Re-conceptualization and the emergence of discourse meaning as a theory of translation*, in *Meaning in Translation*, ed. by B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and M. Thelen, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 105-147.

lation theory. Although published earlier than Lewandowska's seminal paper, it could well be treated as polemical; it postulates combining the framework of cognitive linguistics with that of anthropological theory of communication. In translation, the author writes, "we always deal with the same mechanism: a complicated mental process in the service of intercultural communication".[11]

In the Polish scene, various applications of CL to TS mostly span the last decade. Two aspects seem most inspiring: transfer of scene construals across languages in various types of translation, and cognitive theory of metaphor. Works on these subjects are exteremely varied, thus illustrating the potential of the approach. It might seem that since creative scene construals might be seen to characterize literary works, and poetry in particular, metaphor would be found in just these genres. Yet when envisaging metaphor as a mode of thinking, CL claims that it is ubiquitous in language and that languages include in their repertoire wide arrays of words and structures that they leave at the disposal of language users of all persuasions. In consequence – unlike earlier theories of language and literature – CL makes no principled distinction between 'literature' and 'non-literature'. TS of the cognitive persuasion follows suit. Consequently, early attempts made by young Polish scholars at taking the cognitive perspective when researching translation involve texts which are most obviously 'non-literary'. Thus, an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Katarzyna Waszczuk[12] applies Lakoff's cognitive theory of metaphor to the *Treaty on European Union* and classifies metaphors which occur in the three parallel texts according to their cognitive source domains (*European integration is [...] a building an edifice, removal of barriers, working of a machinery*), looking for convergence of conceptualizations and culture-bound origins of metaphors as used by different cultural communities. By showing that conceptual metaphors which exist in a given culture influence people's conceptualization of abstract phenomena (viz. the process of European integration), Waszczuk's work corroborates main postulates and assumptions of Lakoff's theory, at the same time contributing to cognitive thought on translation. By the same token, the dissertation by a cognitive

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[11] K. Hejwowski, *Kognitywno-komunikacyjna teoria przekładu* (A cognitive and communicative theory of translation), Warszawa, PWN, 2007, p. 9. Translation – E.T.

[12] K. Waszczuk, *Metafora w kształtowaniu pojęcia integracji europejskiej. Analiza porównawcza angielskiej, polskiej i szwedzkiej wersji Traktatu Konstytucyjnego Unii Europejskiej* (Metaphor as a factor shaping the notion of European integration. A comparative analysis of English, Polish and Swedish versions of the Treaty on European Union). Unpublished PhD dissertation, 2010.

linguist and practicing translator, Sergyj Tyupa,[13] refers to a type of specialized tests (clinical tests) and employs the notion of scene construal to discuss the problem of translation assessment. The empirical material that constitutes Tyupa's corpus is a real challenge for the translator, since the tests are applied to assess – and attempt to measure – patients' feelings and emotions. This is a sphere that is particularly difficult to grasp, and the framework of CL proves most promising in plotting the translator's strategies and techniques. Further, new vistas were opened by Rafał Augustyn, who developed Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk's notion of re-conceptualization as an instrument for construction of meaning in specialized translation.[14]

The CL framework finds its applications also in work dealing with interpreting: the category of point of view, derived from the Ronald Langacker theory of subjectification, that is the degree of the subject's (i.e. the interpreter's) overt or covert presence in the object of conceptualization (i.e. the message delivered) was analysed by Łukasz Wiraszka.[15] Wiraszka's book convincingly demonstrates – and explains – ways in which the contents of the message produced by the interpreter are influenced, or distorted, by their use of point of view markers. It is a significant contribution to the linguistic theory of interpretation and to interpreting pedagogy.

Translation of texts that represent the genre referred to as expository prose also became the subject of cognitivist reflection. An important work is the monograph by Aleksander Gomola, a linguist, theologian and translator, devoted to text written by proponents of feminist theology.[16] Written in the cognitivist vein, the book does not directly discuss problems involved in translation of texts in which grammatical gender plays a fundamental role, but by discussing the nature and verbal expression of conceptual metaphors which underlie feminist theology it supplies information valuable both to theorists of translation and to practicing translators. Most significantly, it also provides evidence for the value of interdisciplinary approaches in TS. This is also

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[13] S. Tyupa, *Back-translation: theoretical framework and practical applications*, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2012.

[14] R. Augustyn, *Re-conceptualisation and meaning construction in specialised translation*, Paper read at the 3rd International Conference on Meaning Construction, Meaning Interpretation: Applications and Implications (CRAL13), 18-20 July 2013.University of La Rioja (Logroño, Spain).

[15] Ł. Wiraszka, *Kategoria punktu widzenia w przekładzie ustnym z perspektywy językoznawstwa kognitywnego (w relacji język polski – język angielski)* (The category of Point of View in interpreting in the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics [PL-EN]) [forthcoming].

[16] A. Gomola, *Bóg kobiet. Studium językoznawczo-teologiczne* (The God of women. A linguistic and theological study), "Teolingwistyka", 7 (2010).

true about one of early applications of the CL framework to problems involved in interpretation and translation of written texts, a doctoral dissertation, written by a linguist and a translator, Agnieszka Gicala.[17] The author applies tenets of cognitive theory of metaphor to argument-constitutive metaphors that occur in a treatise by Meister Eckhart, a mediaeval theologian and mystic, and proves the applicability of the theory to research on originals and translations spanning long periods of time, and produced by translators who represent different moral values and cultural backgrounds. Once again, the framework of CL seems both to feed and to underpin the cognitive – and cognitivist – translation theory.

The category of point of view and its rendering in translation were shown as constitutive elements of a cognitive translation theory in a work by Małgorzata Cierpisz, who examines the problem as it is seen in Nabokov's *Lolita* and its Polish translations.[18] Looking for grammatical markers of point of view, Cierpisz compares two attested Polish translations of the novel in terms of the translators' renderings of the category. She demonstrates that the overall meaning of the translated text depends to a large degree upon equivalent signaling of changing perspectives in literary narrative. Once again, CL proves effective as a tool in the description of apparent grammatical minutiae which in fact constitute overall meaning.

The cognitive linguistic framework was also successfully applied to the type of translation which, although relatively new, seems to steadily gain in significance, that is: audiodescription. Audiodescription involves translating visual elements of film sound track into verbal expressions, thus catering for the needs of audiences that are visually impaired. The pioneering work done by two Polish cognitive linguists, Anna Jankowska[19] and Łukasz Bogucki,[20]

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[17] A. Gicala, *Expressing the Inexpressible in Mystical Experience. Conceptual metaphor and Blending in "The Cloud of Unknowing" and its Translations: Underlying Image Schemata and Axiology*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2005.

[18] M. Cierpisz, *Kategoria punktu widzenia w języku i narracji literackiej na przykładzie "Lolity" Nabokova i jej polskich przekładów. Perspektywa kognitywna* (The category of Point of View In literary language and narration, as illustrated by Vladimir nabokov's "Lolita" and its Polish translations. The cognitive perspective), Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2008.

[19] A. Jankowska, *Tłumaczenie skryptów audio deskrypcji z języka angielskiego jako alternatywna metoda tworzenia skryptów audiodeskrypcji. Od teorii do praktyki* (Translating audiodescription scripts from English as an alternative technique of creating audiodescription scripts. From theory to practice), Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2013. An English version is forthcoming.

[20] Ł. Bogucki, *Areas and methods of audiovisual translation research*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2013.

add significantly to the cognitivist branch of contemporary Polish TS. The former analysed originally written audiodescription scripts in relation to translation of scripts written in another language. The discussion, carried out within the CL framework (scene construal and dimensions of imagery), led to interesting conclusions concerning (prospective) translators' perception and their expectations concerning reception by the audience: yet another aspect of translation theory was discovered, at the same time pointing to the applicability of CL instruments.

In terms of its character, and in relation to translation problems, audiovisual translation comes close to what Roman Jakobson defined as intersemiotic translation. For the branch of TS that deals with this type of translation activity linguistic cognitivism seems especially suitable, both as a theoretical framework and as guide for practicing translators. Work done by a cognitive linguist and theorist of intersemiotic translation Alina Kwiatkowska[21] supplies ample evidence to illustrate her thesis that CL can help to explain many of the crucial problems facing a scholar who investigates the complex interface between a picture and its verbal description, seen as an instance of intersemiotic translation. The inherently interdisciplinary character of TS dealing with intersemiotic translation finds its reflection in a doctoral dissertation written by Agata Hołobut,[22] a cognitive linguist, musician and practicing translator. In cooperation with students of the Faculty of Industrial Design of the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts Hołobut investigated the process in which a project of an object is described in words, and then translated into an actual physical shape. With today's TS widening its scope to cover types of translation other than inter- or intralinguistic, evidence proving applicability of the CL framework to intersemiotic translation is particularly significant.

The above survey is certainly incomplete; the author of the present paper has only referred to works directly known to her. However, it might suffice to demonstrate that the cognitive perspective is really significant for Polish TS of today. The reasons are obvious. First, the CL framework seems particularly close to the hearts of Polish linguists, who are well aware of the pre-structuralist tradition, particularly in areas significant to translation. Second, to pursue ST topics in a systematic way, one needs more than even a very precise instrument for text analysis.[23] With translation seen as a subjective

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[21] A. Kwiatkowska, *Image, Language, Cognition*, Piotrków Trybunalski, Naukowe Wydawnicwo Piotrkowskie, 2013.

[22] A. Hołobut, *Projekt przedmiotu użytkowego a jego projekt językowy (analiza kognitywna)* (Object design and verbal design. [A cognitive analysis]), Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2008.

[23] K. Hejwowski, *Kognitywno-komunikacyjna teoria przekładu*, cit., p. 37.

process of mediation between discourses immersed in cultural contexts, translation becomes a truly interdisciplinary enterprise, going beyond either linguistics or theory of literature in the standard understanding of these disciplines. With its emphasis on subjectivity of perception and expression as well as culture-specific underpinnings of grammatical structure, CL framework seems best suited to the needs of a linguistically minded translation theorist. Third, to a literary scholar the CL model of language and language use, and especially the tenets concerning dimensions of imagery and metaphor, offers a precise instrument to work with. In effect, CL-grounded analyses corroborate (or undermine, as the case might be) opinions offered by literary critics, which are often based on intuitive judgments. Thus, the general advantages of taking the cognitive – and cognitivist – perspective are twofold. First, the CL approach helps to bridge the gap between linguistics and literary study – a rift that is still well grounded, but detrimental to both sides. Second, as is the case in all scholarly activity, more principled analysis leads to more principled reflection.

To sum up, one cannot but agree with the statement made by one of TS scholars, favourable to the idea of taking the cognitive perspective: "CL, to the extent that it recognizes the value of literature along with other social and cultural aspects of human cognition, is ideally situated to serve as a common scientific testing ground upon which the varying approaches to translation may empirically verify their claims. [I hope] that eventually skepticism concerning the possibility of developing a theory of translation will prove unfounded".[24]

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[24] D. Strack, *Literature In the Crucible of Translation: A Cognitive Account*, Okayama, University Education Press, 2007.