Review of Chesterman, A. (2016) Memes of translation: the spread of ideas in translation theory (Revised Edition)
Valdez, S.

Reviewed by Susana Valdez (University of Lisbon)

Targeted mainly at professional translators, translation trainees and their teachers, *Memes of Translation* sets out ambitious metatheoretical, theoretical and practical aims, which it reaches. Its first aim is to propose a conceptual framework that meaningfully links varied and distinct views of translation. Its second is to build a Popperian theory of translation — oriented by "tentative theory, error elimination and the evolution of objective knowledge" (x) — in combination with norm theory and (partially) action theory. The guiding "building-blocks are the concepts of norm, strategy and value" (x). Finally, the volume aims to show that translation theory is useful and applicable to translation practice. First published in 1997, this 2016 revised edition with minor corrections and improvements offers an update at the end of each chapter with references to more recent research and addresses criticisms of the 1997 version. This book remains mandatory (re)reading.

Chesterman introduces the volume by describing the origin and meaning of the word "theory" — from the Classical Greek *theoros* came the noun *theoria* (seeing or contemplating) — in order to establish the central thread that will help the reader establish a link to piece together an apparently unconnected array of views on and related to translation: theory is a way of seeing, a point of view, an idea. Surviving ideas are called memes.

Translations are described as "survival machines for memes" (Chapter 1). Memes are a concept borrowed from Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (1976). This "umbrella-idea" can be defined "simply [as] an idea that spreads, [and] ideas spread, replicate themselves, like genes do" (x).

Translation also has memes, translation memes: concepts and ideas which "affect the way translators think and translate" (12). Five "supermemes" of translation theory are selected to depict fundamental translation issues discussed throughout the history of translation: source-target, equivalence, untranslatability, free-vs-literal, all-writing-is-

translating. The "locus of memes" is explained through Popper's three Worlds. The physical world (World 1) refers to the world of the physical entities. The mental or psychological world (World 2) concerns the plane of mental objects. The world of the "products of the human mind" (World 3) refers to objective knowledge (Popper 1978, 144). Memes exist in all three. A Popperian meme is introduced at this stage: faced with a Problem (P1), a Tentative Theory (TT) is put forward and subjected to a process of Error Elimination (EE) through "tests and criticism of all kinds, [compared] with alternative theories, checked for internal consistency, checked against the data and against new data, checked for the testable hypotheses it generates, and so on" (12) resulting in a new Problem (P2) and the schema starts again. Hence the equation: P1 $\rightarrow$ TT $\rightarrow$ EE $\rightarrow$ P2.

In the Update section, Chesterman reflects on the productivity of the meme metaphor in TS. Vermeer, in 1997 (the same year as the first edition of this volume), calls for more work "to find out how far the meme idea carries ... for example, for translation studies" (163–164). In spite of the coincidence, neither Chesterman nor Vermeer knew about the other's interest in memes at the time. Pöchhacker, in an *Introduction to Interpreting Studies* (2004), finds the metaphor productive. In fact, even though *The Translation Studies Bibliography* does not list "meme" as a keyword, this book (the 1997 and 2016 editions) has been quoted 1484 times according to Google Scholar. For Chesterman, memes have certainly been a productive metaphor, as he has discussed them in several articles (cf. 1996, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009). Nonetheless, the author finds that "the notion cannot be said to have entered the mainstream of Translation Studies" partly, in the author's view, due to criticisms of the adoption of the meme concept itself: does it exist or is it a metaphor?

Chapter 2, "The evolution of translation memes", makes use of Popper's scientific methodology to explain the evolution of European translation theory insofar as each stage presented is a Tentative Theory put to the test. Consequently, the chapter starts with an analysis of eight meme-complexes in overlapping, cumulative and ahistorical stages: words, the word of God, rhetoric, logos, linguistic science, communication, target, and cognition. The chapter then discusses the "current pool of translation memes" as a contradictory amalgamate of "traces of all the preceding memes or meme-complexes" (40), a "conceptual mess" (42).

In the Update section, Chesterman considers the development (or lack thereof) of a "unified general theory of translation" (44) towards which this volume aims to contribute.

In spite of the lack of a common guiding thread — evidenced by the focus on different theories and methodologies — the discipline of TS focuses on better understanding its object of research either by describing the act and event of translation, explaining and predicting translational behavior, or assessing its "effects and consequences" (45).

Drawing mainly on Toury's norm theory, Chapter 3, "From memes to norms", focuses on norms. Norms are long-lasting, dominating memes that guide translational behavior (how translators translate and how the community at large evaluates translations). The author then establishes a distinction between normative and prescriptive approaches: discourses "having to do with norms" vs. discourses that dictate "what translators *should* do" and "what translations *should* be like" (50). This chapter proposes a new set of norms as an alternative to Toury's initial and operational norms: (1) product or expectancy norms established "by the expectations of the target language readership" (62); and (2) process or professional norms that "regulate the translation process itself" (67). This proposal is circumscribed to the norms established by competent professional translators: "the norm authorities *par excellence*" (65). Chesterman's professional norms do not address translators who are not recognized as competent or not working full-time in translation, excluding from research trainees, volunteers, user-generated and crowdsourced translation, to name just a few. Translation is not only done by "competent" professionals, as is duly acknowledged by the author later on. However, this exclusive attention on competent translators is in line with the concept of memes: bad translations/translators "do not last" (2).

Norms are explanatory hypotheses and, as such, Chesterman (in the Update section) asks for more evidence on the existence of norms. An observed textual regularity is not enough. Text-external indicators have to be sought, such as belief statements, authoritative norm statements, hypothesis testing, norm counter-evidence, and alternative explanations (see also Chesterman 2006).

In order to try to conform to the norms in force, translators resort to strategies. Chapter 4, "Translation Strategies", covers these in a comprehensive, integrated classification consisting of thirty syntactic, semantic and pragmatic strategies. Strategies — goal-oriented, problem-centered, potentially conscious, intersubjective (86–89) — are "forms of explicit textual manipulation ... [that are] directly observable" (86). Gambier's analysis (2008) of the terminological confusion around the use of strategy and related terms is eluded to in the Update section. Chesterman takes this opportunity to explain the

distinction between terms referring to macro- and micro-level actions, and clarify his use of the concept.

Chapter 5, "Translation as Theory", is mostly dedicated to assessment, offering a conceptual framework composed of five models, each focusing on a specific norm: retrospective assessment (relation norm), prospective assessment (communication norm), lateral assessment (expectancy norm), introspective assessment (accountability norm) and pedagogical assessment (all translation norms). Popper's schema of scientific development is applied here to the practice of translation and translation assessment. To translate is to theorize: to propose a Tentative Theory to solve the Problem of translation. In this sense, a translation is "a view of the source text, the translator's view" (115). To assess a translation is to test the translator's view, his/her Tentative Theory. In the Update section, Chesterman takes a closer look at the research carried out on revision, a "clear gap" in the 1997 edition that he wishes to fill.

Chapter 6, "The development of translational competence", goes back to Popperian theory to suggest a correlation between the stages in the history of translation theory (see Chapter 2) and the phases of professional translational competence acquisition. The translator trainee is introduced to each stage "in an ordered succession, ... [and] may even acquire a sense of the complementarity, of the co-existence of differences, which lies at the very heart of translation" (157). For each different stage of development, a collection of valuable, although rather general, didactic activities is put forward. For a better understanding of skill acquisition, the author draws on Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1986) five steps towards expertise. Models of conceptually and empirically based translation competence are referred to in the Update section.

"On translation ethics" (Chapter 7) takes up the translators' ethical concerns in their relationship with the world (macro-ethical matters) and *apropos* their decisions during the translation process (micro-ethical matters). Ethical values are at the heart of norms "that govern translational action" (xiii). Norms thus promote specific ethical values, viz. clarity, truth, trust, understanding. These are analyzed throughout this chapter and linked with the norms of expectancy, relation, accountability and communication respectively. The analysis of FIT's Translator's Charter (1963/1994) illustrates how this example of a norm statement promotes certain prevailing values. This "lumper" perspective (Chesterman 2016) is, due to its vague nature, probably the most difficult section of the book to put into practice when faced with concrete ethical problems.

"*So what?*" we ask ourselves as readers, prompted by Chesterman's signature question. *Memes of Translation* attempts to answer a *So what* question itself. Faced with a complex interdisciplinary subject such as Translation Studies, which has different foci, how can we professional translators, trainees and teachers interpret theory and find a productive common thread to put into practice? This volume, in a comprehensive and comprehensible coherent effort, pulls together apparently disarrayed threads of thought. This constructive view of our field is ordered but oversimplified, as general overviews tend to be by their very nature. However, this is a necessary evil to attempt to link translation theory and professional translators to create a volume that is at once an invaluable teaching and learning resource and a (meta)theoretical reflection.

References:

Chesterman, Andrew. 1996. "Teaching Translation Theory: the Significance of Memes." In *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 3*, ed. by Cay Dollerup and Vibeke Appel, 63–71. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

----------- 2000. "Memetics and Translation Studies." *Synaps* 5: 1–17. Norges Handelshøyskole: Bergen.

----------- 2005. "The Memetics of Knowledge." In *Knowledge Systems and Translation*, ed. by H.V. Dam, J. Engberg, and H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast, 17–30. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

----------- 2006. "A Note on Norms and Evidence." In *Translation and Interpreting – Training and Research*, ed. by Jorma Tommola, and Yves Gambier, 13–19. Turku: University of Turku, Department of English Translation Studies.

----------- 2007. "On the Idea of a Theory." *Across Languages and Cultures* 8(1): 1–16.

----------- 2009. "The view from Memetics." *Paradigmi* 27(2): 75–88.

----------- 2016. "Moving Conceptual Boundaries: So what?" Presentation at the EST Conference 2016. "Boundaries", Aarhus University, September, 15–17.

Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Stuart E. Dreyfus. 1986. *Mind Over Machine*. Oxford: Blackwell and New York: The Free Press.

Gambier, Yves. 2008. "Stratégies et tactiques en traduction et interprétation". In *Efforts and Models in Interpreting and Translation Research*, ed. by G. Hansen, A. Chesterman, and H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast, 63–82. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Pöchhacker, Franz. 2004. *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. London and New York: Routledge.

Vermeer, Hans J. 1997. "Translation and the 'Meme'." *Target* 9(1): 155–166.

Reviewer's address

Susana Valdez

Department of Modern Languages, Cultures and Literature

FCSH, NOVA University

Avenida de Berna, 26-C

1069-061 Lisboa

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies

Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa

Alameda da Universidade

1600-214 LISBOA

Portugal

susana.valdez@fcsh.unl.pt