

## A bibliometric analysis of Master's theses relevant to Translation Studies in Thailand

Yamamoto Kazuharu\*

### Abstract

This paper reveals current trends and research perspectives of master's theses relevance to TS between 1988 and 2014 in Thailand through a bibliometric analysis. The main findings from this survey indicate that number of master's theses published was in decline. Master's theses still focus primarily on a linguistic approach. The evidence will provide lectures/researchers with critical and useful views to consider how current translator education responds to needs of students and the marketplace, and how research on translation studies reflect the current state of society in Thailand.

**Keyword:** Bibliometrics, Translation Studies, Thailand; research trend, master's thesis

---

\* Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, Thailand  
Corresponding author's email: kazuharu.yam@mahidol.ac.th

## 1. Introduction

It is estimated that there are over 250 educational institutions specializing in Translation Studies (TS) and that their number is on the increase (Pym & Caminade, 1998; Malmkaer, 2004). Translation programs at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been provided not only by curricula at linguistics or applied linguistics departments, but also by departments related to intercultural studies. This respect implies that TS is a field that pursues its individual research objectives and theories based on an interdisciplinary approach.

With the recent remarkable expansion of translation programs, one of the branches of TS according to Holmes's map (1988/2004) developed by Toury (1995), 'translator training' or translator education has seen increased opportunities for practical and theoretical debate within the academic fields. As an identifiable achievement, the TS journal, *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* which specializes in translator and interpreter training has been published since 2007. Additionally, scholarly articles on translator education published in other TS journals are also becoming

common. For instance, Binhua & Lei (2009) described recent developments of translation and interpreting programs in China and Lim (2006) reported on the status of translator training at universities in Korea.

In translator education, it is natural that high level professional competency is required to respond to the rapidly changing demands of the global labor market. At the same time, the quality assurance of translation programs has seen a growing interest in the higher education setting, especially in the European Union (EU) countries which need to deal with increased demands in the linguistic industry for highly skilled translators (Aula, int., 2005). As a policy addressing this issue, the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) structured under the Council of Europe, set out to provide quality assurance through an educational framework, the European Master in Translation (EMT) program. In addition, another framework—the European Higher Education Area—supported by a social constructive approach, has also had a significant impact on translator education in EU countries (Presas, 2012; Rico, 2010).

As for quality assurance in other countries, Tao (2012) reviews case studies that apply the specific frameworks in China where the discipline of translator education is expanding rapidly. Further, in Australia, in terms of such frameworks for translator education, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) sets conditions required of translators. As a result, the curricula of translator education in Australia are designed so that candidates for translators train to fulfill these requirements of NAATI, and after graduation they can achieve these goals as long as they complete qualification courses (Orlando, 2011, p. 301).

In Thailand's case, it has been over 20 years since translation programs were launched, but, there has so far been little discussion from an academic standpoint on developing translators, and there is little quantitative evidence demonstrating characteristics and tendencies of findings accumulated through research in the field of TS conducted in Thailand. Therefore, it would prove difficult to discuss the desired direction of research in TS or strategic education matters for develop-

ment of curricula specific to translation. Also, the issue of insufficient findings and poor discussion on cultivation of a linguistic specialist, such as a translator or an interpreter who facilitates intercultural communication, should be tackled and shared within ASEAN countries where various, endemic, and indigenous languages and cultures exist.

This study aims to reveal overall trends and futures of master's theses relevant to TS in Thailand, which is a member of ASEAN, and to discuss issues and directions of translator education offered in HEIs in Thailand. The study is quantitatively conducted by the bibliometrics method which is defined by van Doorslaer & Gambier (2015, p. 306) as follows: 'the study of production, dissemination, and use of scientific publications and communications, based mainly on textual parameters'.

## **2. Backgrounds on Education and Research**

In translator education in HEIs in Thailand, the first specialized translation program was offered in 1993 as a master's course at Thammasat University (TU), a leading national university in Thailand.

Following TU, Ramkhamheang University (RU) provided a program for graduate students in 1995, and Mahidol University (MU) and Chulalongkorn University (CU) have also offered master's level courses since the late 1990s. Language pairs in these TS programs are English and Thai, except at TU which has offered two language combinations: English/Thai and French/Thai. Translator education over 20 years has resulted in producing more than 1,000 graduated students majoring in Translation and gradually accumulating TS-related scholarship in the form of master's thesis.

As for studies on bibliometrics approaches to master's theses, not only scholarly articles but also master's theses or dissertations should be considered when looking into the individual local current situations—so-called 'local environments of TS'. As for Zinyun Xu's study (2015), he gathered nearly 1,300 Chinese-language theses on interpreting as a corpus for scientometrics analysis and showed the potential of a complex and dynamic field of interpreting studies published in China and drew a map of a rapidly growing field of interpreting studies. We can also see the same trend in

Taiwan from Lan, Dong, & Chiu (2009).

As an Iranian case, Nouraei & Karimnia (2015) shed light on the current situation in the modern society of Iran by evaluating 120 master's theses extracted from an established data bank of 400 master's theses abstracts on TS between 2002 and 2012. They indicated that 'comparative models' of translation research had the highest frequency for master's theses. On the other hand, the following six areas; 'translation and technology', 'translation history', 'translation ethics', 'interpreting', 'translator training' and 'translation profession' were relatively untouched. In Asian countries, it is common that master's students tend to be interested in a linguistic approach based research rather than extra-linguistic approaches.

As Xu (2015) mentioned, although master's theses have been not strongly considered in academia, they are regarded as 'the result of a great deal of work, more often than not an empirical rather than theoretical nature', whereby master's theses remain an important academic resource, especially for TS scholars or graduate students. More data-driven discussion on underlying trends and

characteristics of master's theses in Thailand would result in contributing to develop translator education in ASEAN countries and recognizing the local environment of TS research by master's students as a case study.

### 3. Methods

The research method adopted for the study employs statistical bibliometric analysis for investigating research activities and research profiles of master's theses. The analysis consists of publication counts by year, number of publications per institution, distribution by research perspective and theme, genres of translation methodology perspective, and language combinations.

As for data selection, all master's theses in the study were gathered from the Research Library of the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) database. Since NRCT database comprises all master's theses in Thailand, the database has been identified as being most suitable for the bibliometric analysis in terms of reflecting locality of the data.

Data for analysis was extracted by searching titles of master's theses by keywords in both English and Thai as

follows: translation, translating, translation book, translation work, and translator. The corpus was compiled in May 2015. After deleting the titles unrelated to TS, the resulting structured corpus contained 75 entries of master's theses. The publication period covers the past two and a half decades, from 1988 to 2014. The investigation in the study mainly focuses on research perspectives, language combinations as research targets and productive institutions of master's theses.

In terms of the framework for thematic analysis such as sub-theme classification and research perspectives, I have proposed a three-level coding system in Table 1. The first level, classifying theories on the coding systems, includes three categories: general theory, partial theory, and applied theory, which roughly correspond to Holmes's map (Holmes, 1988/2004; Toury, 1995) as a foundational and key framework for TS. The second level includes 11 research perspectives and the third level 20 sub-themes of the perspectives. They were designed by adapting them as a prototype from the Translation Studies Bibliography (TSB) framework with reference to one of the biggest data-

bases specific to TS—Bibliography of Interpreting and Translation (BITRA) architecture—for corresponding perspectives.

It should be noted here that each entry may be assigned multiple labels for categories on TSB or BITRA databases, however, no two categories completely overlap in the corpus of the study. More details about the structures and scholarly selection criteria for inclusion of entries and classification categories of the entries in TSB and BITRA can be explored in Zanettin, Saldanha, & Harding (2015).

As for the scope and limitations of the study, master's theses which returned zero hits on the databases, is not included. Similarly, master's theses not registered in the databases are also beyond the scope of the study. However, I realize that the study cannot include every master's thesis related to TS research due to methodological constraints. However, a diversity range of master's theses is available from all universities, so the methodology was not limited to just those found in the database of universities offering translation programs.

**Table 1** Three layer classification for the categorization of research

|                        | Theories | Perspectives                   | Sub-themes                                       |
|------------------------|----------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Translation<br>Studies | General  | Theory-Itself-Development      | Translation Theory                               |
|                        |          | Research Methodology           | Research Methodology                             |
|                        | Partial  | Bibliometric                   | Bibliographies                                   |
|                        |          | Historical                     | History of Translation and Interpreting          |
|                        |          | Psychological and<br>Cognitive | Process-Oriented Studies                         |
|                        |          | Social and Cultural            | Intercultural Studies                            |
|                        |          |                                | Translation and Gender                           |
|                        |          |                                | Translation and Politics                         |
|                        |          |                                | Translation Policies                             |
|                        |          | Translation Methodology        | Contrastive and Comparative Studies              |
|                        |          |                                | Translation Problem-Based Studies                |
|                        | Applied  | Educational                    | Translator Training                              |
|                        |          |                                | Translation and Language Teaching                |
|                        |          | Professional                   | Translator Status and Roles                      |
|                        |          |                                | Translation and the Language Industry            |
|                        |          | Technological                  | Machine (-aided) Translation                     |
|                        |          |                                | Terminology and Lexicography                     |
|                        |          |                                | Localization                                     |
|                        |          | Translation Criticism          | Evaluation/Quality/Assessment/Testing<br>Reviews |

## 4. Results and Discussion

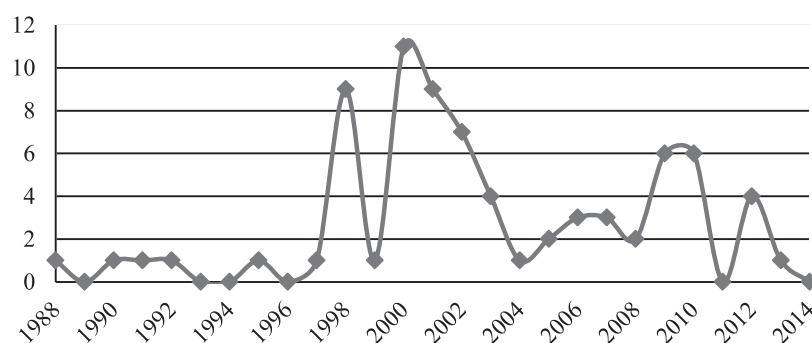
### 4.1 Publication Number and Trends

The chart in Figure 1 indicates the publication trends, different types and the timeline. It is clear that the number of academic articles has been increasing over the last 10 years and has been on an upward trend with a steady output over the last 20 years. Master's theses however reached a peak in 2000 and has been on a declining trend since.

How should we interpret this finding of a relative decline in the publishing of master's theses? Universities with translation programs have offered graduate level courses since the late 1990s leading to a temporary increase in the number of master's theses between 1997 and 2002. This phenomenon was a short-term trend. However, MU offers a regular program for translation and the regular program requires students to be enrolled full-time; the others provide translation programs as special programs with lectures scheduled for evenings or weekend sessions and the special programs do not expect students to be enrolled full-time. That is to say, targeted

students in the special programs are those who have a regular job weekdays or some experience in the translation industry or those who are unable to maintain full-time student status. Writing a master's thesis usually requires at least two years because it provides 12 graduate-level course credits of thesis research under a thesis option. On the other hand, alternative the individual study (IS) option under the non-thesis option provides not more than six course credits. In other words, the IS option is a feasible way to graduate in two years as scheduled. This option may be better for students with time constraints in learning and researching. HEIs have faced issues of student retention arising from the supply-demand mismatching, especially at the graduate level and curricula of the translation programs aim to align content with the needs of the marketplace and students (AUN, 2015; Kiraly, 2000). If one response to the issues is special programs offered from initiative and large-scale universities such as CU and TU, it is unreasonable to expect more master's theses to be completed for the next several years.

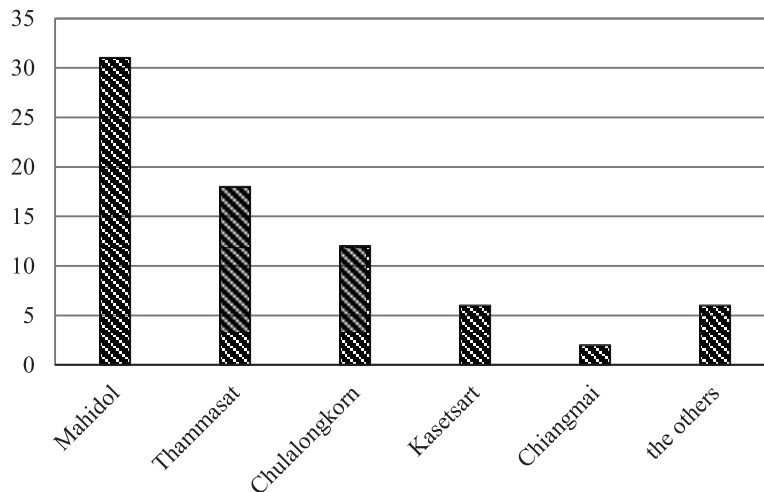
**Figure 1** Number and trends of master's theses in the database by year



#### 4.2 Most Productive Institutions

The bar graph below in Figure 2 summarizes the number of master's theses published by different institutions. The bars are arranged in order by institution with that regarding the highest number of published research at the top to the institution with the lowest number of published master's theses at the bottom.

As shown in Figure 2, the most productive institution was MU (n=31) and next was TU (n=18) with CU ranked third. Master's graduates produced by the top three universities offering TS programs since the 1990s contributed to 81.3% of the total, the remainder being master's graduates from institutions with no translation programs. Institutions not offering a translation program included: National Institute of Development Administration, Khon Kean University, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Naresuan University, and Phetchaburi Rajabhat University.

**Figure 2** Most productive institutions and the total number of master's theses

A notable finding from Figure 2 was that the number of master's theses by institution had no correlation with the number of students enrolled in educational programs at that institution. For example, TU and CU, which offer special courses for translation, usually accept the most students for translation programs about 20–40 per year, compared to five for the regular program at MU which offers the translation program as a regular course. In this regard, TU used to provide a regular translation program specific to French/Thai language combination that contributed to 72.2% ( $n=13$ ) of the counted master's theses of TU in the database.

The existing special program offered by TU contributes to only 27.7% ( $n=5$ ) of the total master's theses of TU. For this reason, as described above in 4.1, it may be considered that there is a tendency for full-time students who study the regular program to choose to write a thesis rather than conduct IS or translation work, the names of which differ according to institution. For instance, at CU it is called Special Research offering three credits, and at TU it is called Independent Study, also for three credits. If there is a tendency for students enrolled in special courses to choose the IS over a master's thesis, it is necessary to present evidence supporting

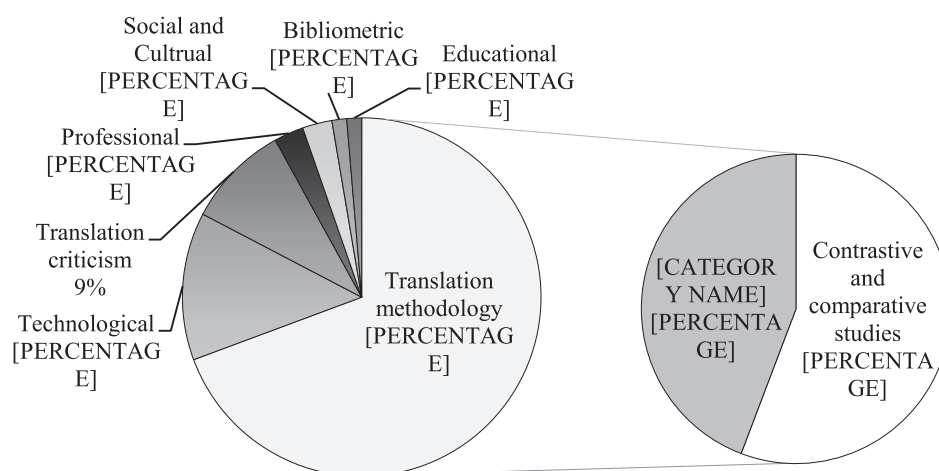
this tendency through an empirical study focusing on IS produced from the translation programs in Thailand. However, it is beyond the scope of this study, but would be a useful topic of further research on IS.

### 4.3 Perspectives Landscape

The pie chart in Figure 3 illustrates the breakdown of perspectives in translation research and the proportion of sub-theme perspectives in translation research contained in the current database.

Translation methodology perspectives accounted for 69% of research categories, which ranked first rank. This perspective usually adopted a linguistic approach and tended to be focused on contrastive and comparative studies (56%) and translation problem-based studies (44%). Technological perspective accounted for 14% and ranked second. Translation criticism accounted for 9%, but researches based on professional perspective or social and cultural perspective were not found.

**Figure 3** Master's theses by perspective, and sub-category of translation methodology perspective, as a percentage

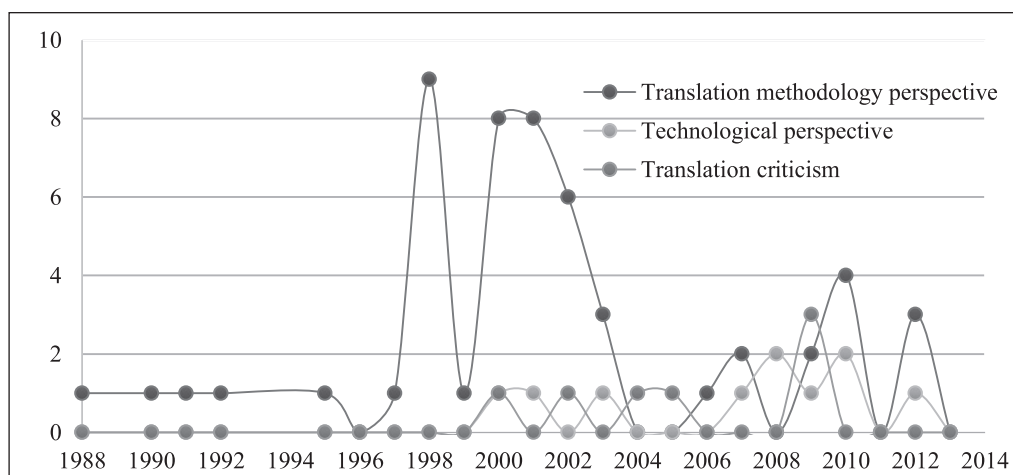


The chart in Figure 4 depicts that the number and trend followed by the three most common perspectives used in master's theses by year. The translation methodology perspective saw a sharp increase from 1998 and peaked in 2001. A sudden drop in the frequency of the translation methodology perspective after 2002 is observed. The tendency almost matches the number of master's theses in the chart in Figure 1. Studies based on other perspectives were equally distributed throughout the years.

It is surprising that the research perspective tendency identified in Figure 4 can be seen in the context of other countries or different databases. As shown by van Doorslaer & Gambier (2015),

keywords such as 'comparative research' or 'strategy/procedure' in TSB appeared more often than others. Furthermore, as observed by Li (2002), students in translation programs in Hong Kong valued first and second language acquisition much more than translation skills. In other words, students who were not native English speakers may tend to focus on developing their foreign languages skills. As a reflection of students' needs, when they do research, they may prefer to select a linguistics based textual perspective. The selection may also be influenced by the specialization of their research advisors, institutions or programs in which they are enrolled.

**Figure 4** Number and trend of master's theses based on the top three ranked perspectives identified in the database per year



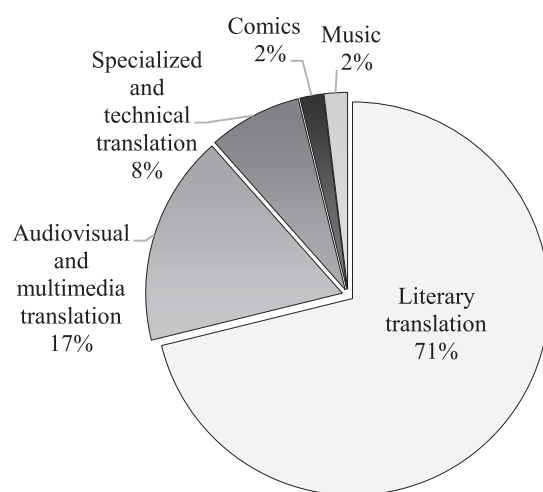
#### **4.4 Genres Landscape of Translation Methodology Perspective**

The pie chart in Figure 5 shows a breakdown of translation methodology perspective based studies by genre. Literary translation accounted for 71% and seems to be in relative decline, but remains the most popular genre. Second was audiovisual and multimedia translation, which accounted for 17%. In contrast, specialized and technical translation, and the genres of politics policy, song, and history remain unpopular, representing less than 10% of the total.

From the above result, it appears that literary translation was most popular for TS scholars worldwide (Zanettin, et al., 2015; Dong & Chen, 2015) as well as in Thailand. At the same time, perhaps due to this imbalance in genres targeted

for translation research, other genres such as advertising, bible and religious translation, journalism, and food and travel translation have rarely been observed in research. As for further exploration of specialized and technical translation (n=4), this was divided into business (n=3) and localization (n=1). No fields related to the life sciences or law were found contrary to the fact that these less-observed fields or genres had a strong correlation with translation practices in the professional setting. In education, while the curriculums of all translation programs cover literary translation as part of course work, course work specific to the less-observed fields or genres such as localization and philosophy of translation were only offered in certain universities or not offered at all.

**Figure 5** Proportion of translation methodology perspective based master's theses by genre

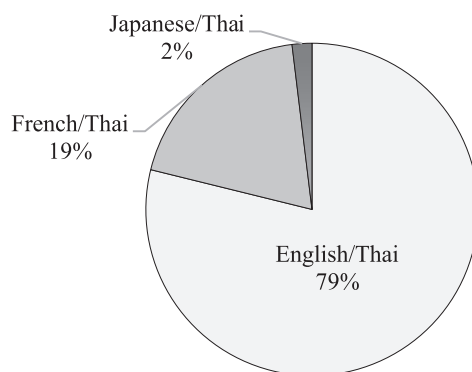


#### 4.5 Language Combinations as Research Targets

The pie chart in Figure 6 presents the language combinations in each research based on the translation methodology approach as themes of the research. English and Thai pairs make up the highest proportion at 79%, and the second highest percentage in language pairs is French and Thai at 19%. Western languages, especially English are dominant.

These language combinations coincided with language pairs in translation programs in Thailand. A possible explanation for this result is that each translation program requires specific language pairs for master's theses according to the regulations of each program. It cannot be denied that research into language pairs comparing Thai without other Asian languages such as Japanese— a combination not offered in existing translation programs— is comparatively rare.

**Figure 6** Proportion of language combinations in master's theses



## 5. Conclusion

This study attempted to investigate the trends and characteristics of master's theses relevant to TS in Thailand during 1992–2014. From findings about research activities for master's theses, the number of master's theses has declined year by year. As for the research profiles of master's theses, most master's theses adopted a linguistic approach which tended to be focused on contrastive and comparative studies and translation problem-based studies for the purpose of improving not only the student's translation skills but also their foreign languages skills. As for language combinations as research targets of master's theses, English–Thai or French–Thai made up 98% of the total. Furthermore, institutions

offering master's translation programs were the most productive institution.

Although the study sheds new light on the recent development and expansion of master's theses in Thailand, some suggestions for future translator education in Thailand should be considered. English retains a dominant position in translation programs for education and research. For that reason, the local TS community in Thailand, especially HEIs, should respect language diversity and welcome students with various languages and backgrounds to meet the needs and demands of both the global and local marketplace. To do this as a first step, restrictions on language combinations such as English and Thai for master's theses in translation programs in Thailand

should be removed. This would open the door for students with various linguistic and cultural backgrounds such as Japanese and Chinese. Moreover, I believe that shifting linguistic limited translator education to competence-based translator education has the potential to facilitate scholarly exchanges between TS students in Thailand and those enrolled in or teaching translation programs elsewhere in ASEAN.

Accepted July 26, 2017

## Acknowledgement

This research project was supported by Mahidol University (Talent Management project).

## References

- Aula, Int. (2005). Translator training and modern market demands. *Perspectives* 13(2), 132–42. doi: 10.1080/09076760508668982.
- Binhua, W., & Lei, M. (2009). Interpreter training and research in mainland China: Recent developments. *Interpreting*, 11(2), 267–283. doi:10.1075/intp.11.2.08wan
- Chee-Bin, J.O. (Ed). (2015). *Guide to AUN-QA assessment at programme level version 3.0*. Bangkok: ASEAN University Network.
- Dong, D., & Chen, M.L. (2015). Publication trends and co-citation mapping of translation studies between 2000 and 2015. *Scientometrics*, 105(2), 1111–1128. doi:10.1007/s11192-015-1769-1
- van Doorslaer, L., & Gambier, Y. (2015). Measuring relationships in Translation Studies: On affiliations and keyword frequencies in the Translation Studies Bibliography. *Perspectives*, 23(2), 305–319. doi: 10.1080/0907676X.2015.1026360
- Holmes, J.S. (1988/2004). The name and nature of translation studies. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *Translation Studies reader* (pp. 180–192). London and New York: Routledge.
- Kiraly, D. (2000). *A social constructivist approach to translator education: Empowerment from theory to practice*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Lan, Y., Dong, D. & Chiu, A. (2009). Research trend and methods in Translation Studies: A comparison between Taiwanese and international publications. *Compilation and Translation Review*, 2(2), 177–191.

- Li, D. (2002). Translator training: What translation students have to say. *Meta*, 47(4), 513. doi:10.7202/008034ar
- Lim, H.O. (2006). A comparison of curricula of graduate schools of interpretation and translation in Korea. *Meta*, 51(2), 215–228.
- Malmkaer, K. (2004). *Translation in undergraduate degree programmes*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Nouraey, P., & Karimnia, A. (2015). The map of translation studies in modern Iran: An empirical investigation. *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*, 2(2), 123–138. doi:10.1080/23306343.2015.1059009
- Orlando, M. (2011). Evaluation of translations in the training of professional translators. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, 5(2), 293–308. doi:10.1080/13556509.2011.10798822
- Presas, M. (2012). Training translators in the European Higher Education Area. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, 6(2), 139–169. doi:10.1080/13556509.2012.10798834
- Pym, A., & Caminade, M. (1998). Translator-training institutions. In M. Baker (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (pp. 280–285). London and New York: Routledge.
- Rico, C. (2010). Translator training in the European Higher Education Area. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, 4(1), 89–114. doi:10.1080/1750399X.2010.10798798
- Tao, Y. (2012). Towards a constructive model in training professional translators: A case study of MTI education program in China. *Babel*, 58(3), 289–308. doi:10.1075/babel.58.3.03tao
- Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive Translation Studies: And, beyond*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Xu, Z. (2015). The past, present and future of Chinese MA theses in Interpreting Studies: A scientometric survey. *Perspectives*, 23(2), 284–304. doi:10.1080/0907676X.2015.1011175
- Zanettin, F., Saldanha, G., & Harding, S.A. (2015). Sketching landscapes in translation studies: A bibliographic study. *Perspectives*, 23(2), 161–182. doi:10.1080/0907676X.2015.1010551