

# Poststructuralism

## In brief



ESP *Posestructuralismo*

### ◀ origins

The term 'poststructuralism' is used to designate a range of approaches which emerged in France and across Europe in the late 1960s and which reacted against the assumptions and goals of the structuralist method. It particularly gained momentum as a result of the interpretation and development of such continental theories by North American scholars.

### ◀ other names

*Poststructuralism* has often been linked to *postmodernism*, although the latter has been primarily associated with the literary and artistic spheres. Both have been connected with the so-called *linguistic turn* or the 'crisis of representation' and with the decline of *metanarratives* or *Grand Récits*, as well as, more generally, with *postpositivist* or *postfoundationalist* perspectives. Poststructuralism has also

frequently woven associations with deconstruction. All these terms overlap and converge into what is perceived as a new epistemological paradigm which has influenced many disciplines.

## abstract

Poststructuralism encompasses a wide range of intellectual proposals which emerged and have gathered momentum since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in such diverse fields as philosophy, linguistics, literary studies, social sciences, the arts, pedagogy, etc., and which challenged traditional approaches—generally based on binary oppositions—to language, society, culture, knowledge and thought. Poststructuralism is linked to authors including Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, and, quintessentially, the philosopher considered to be the father of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida. This movement takes as its starting point the instability of meaning, shows an extreme distrust of concepts such as Truth or Knowledge—traditionally understood to be sacrosanct, unquestionable, and universal values—, and is interested in unravelling the mechanisms and power relations that help to establish certain views and interpretations and make them be perceived as natural or given. Not surprisingly, it has had an important significance in the field of translation studies. In this entry, the main assumptions underlying poststructuralist and deconstructionist thought are summarised and their contribution in relation to previous approaches will be critically assessed. Subsequently, the role of poststructuralism and deconstruction in the development of different approaches within the field of translation studies will be explained. Its influence will be discovered, for instance, in the shift in TS from early scientific and prescriptivist approaches to descriptive approaches to translation (such as those initially advocated by the so-called Manipulation

School and by descriptive translation studies or DTS) as well as in the emergence of critical insights to translation (including postcolonial critique, gender-based approaches to translation and research focused on issues of ideology, power, and authority). Finally, the relevance and potential of poststructuralist and deconstructionist approaches for translation research, translation practice and translator training in our globalised societies of the digital age will be assessed.

## record

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 2022

Martín Ruano, María del Rosario. 2022.

 "Poststructuralism" @ *ENTI (Encyclopedia of translation & interpreting)*. AIETI.

 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6370458>

 [https://www.aieti.eu/enti/poststructuralism\\_ENG/](https://www.aieti.eu/enti/poststructuralism_ENG/)

# Entry



## SPA *Poststructuralismo*

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### **Introduction**

Defining [poststructuralism](#) and uncovering its foundations is a difficult task. A salient feature of the heterogeneous constellation of authors associated with this label and, in general, with what has come to be seen as a distinctive philosophical or epistemological frame over time is its deep-seated belief in the undecidability and indefiniteness of meanings and its intellectual commitment to a constant critique of foundations.

Indeed, attempting to approach the meaning of this term offers a perfect illustration of one of the alleged tenets of poststructuralism and deconstruction: the refusal of the very idea of 'origin' in favour of an understanding of meaning as a result of a ceaseless process of rewritings. While poststructuralism has at times been presented as a

continuation and critical development of structuralist theories, especially of the linguistic theories proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure, the label is far from being a designation adopted or claimed by those authors who are considered to be its main representatives (Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty, among others). In many accounts, the interpretation of such a diversified array of authors and theoretical proposals as a unitary movement or paradigm is seen as the result of its 'translation' or even its 'invention' by American criticism. Over the years, the term has taken on multiple additional meanings and nuances in different disciplines, including translation studies, where it has had a decisive influence.

Against this backdrop, Lundy's (2013: 70) remark is most pertinent. The author highlights the need to analyse the transformations of the meaning of this term in conjunction with its development within different historical contexts and urges us to ask ourselves the crucial question of what drives our interest in poststructuralism and what the importance of the term is for us today. In response to this question, the following section will present a selection of some of the most significant contributions made by poststructuralism, and will assess its influence on the recent history of translation studies. It will also suggest additional answers in relation to the continuing relevance of poststructuralism for translation research and practice today.

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## **Some insights of/into poststructuralism**

Poststructuralism is primarily associated with a particular view of language. Far from being considered a transparent medium for conveying extra-linguistic realities or concepts, language is thought to

shape, construct and constitute reality in a certain way. Therefore, among many other binary oppositions, poststructuralism questions the traditionally univocal relationship between signifier and signified, and the ability (and even the duty) of language to mimetically mirror the world. Rather, its experience is conceived as being always mediated and conditioned by partial, never neutral and potentially contradictory representations which coexist and compete with each other in the social sphere.

As exemplified by Magritte's paintings, the main authors associated with poststructuralism encourage us to distrust an idealised but widespread vision of language as a mirror of nature. In turn, questioning of the capacity of language to convey indubitable meanings makes it possible to dispute the validity of the philosophical projects inspired by this vision, such as rationalism, which are committed to Knowledge or Truth as absolute values, and, more specifically, the tenability of methods of analysis with a long tradition in particular disciplines, for example literary criticism understood as an exercise aimed at discovering the true meaning of texts.



*René Magritte (1929), Ceci n'est pas une pipe. [Source]*

In this sense, poststructuralism invites us to cast doubt on the certainties that we often take for granted or assume to be natural. Instead, it urges us to think about the *conditions* and *processes* that make it possible for certain readings or interpretations to emerge as the 'correct' or 'normal' ones from among all possible options. In contrast to the traditional view that

words and texts contain and convey an immanent meaning, it is emphasised that meaning is created and recreated within different contexts, the conditions of which activate and at the same time limit a vast array of interpretations. This idea, conveyed in [Barthes](#)' vivid declaration of the [death of the author](#), is a basic assumption of different approaches, including [reception theory](#): texts are perceived to be polyphonic and open insofar as they broaden their significance in each new context by weaving what [Julia Kristeva](#) described as '[intertextual](#)' relations with one another. Far from being understood as the source or the key to their meaning, texts are discovered as potentialities waiting to be realised by readers, either individually or within certain [interpretive communities](#) where those readings that are considered 'correct' or 'authoritative' take shape in accordance with certain cultural beliefs and hierarchies. In this sense, although poststructuralism and postmodernism have often been criticised for encouraging the dangerous idea that 'anything goes' and for allegedly promoting the maxim that all interpretations are valid, a common characteristic of the authors associated with this movement is their concern with revealing the socially and historically determined character of what is considered Truth, Knowledge or Morality. Through different methods and proposals, these authors encourage the debunking and subversion of the mechanisms through which so-called 'common sense' is intersubjectively accepted as such and through which hegemonic ideas come to be seen as 'natural' and seemingly unquestionable.

For example, [Jean-François Lyotard](#) calls for the scrutiny and unravelling of the processes shaping what he calls the [Grands Récits](#) or [metanarratives](#)—values such as Reason, Progress or Science, which, despite their contingency and partiality, manage to attain the status of normative and universal ideals, and to act as explanatory frameworks that prefigure a whole multiplicity of phenomena and social practices. Among the thinkers who have analysed these

'superstructures' and mechanisms that govern and mould interpretations and behaviours, [Michel Foucault](#) highlights the importance of [discourse](#) and discursive practices in legitimising the prevailing order, its hierarchies and exclusions, and even in constituting subjectivities. In [Jacques Lacan](#)'s vision, the subject itself comes to be seen, no longer as a simple user, but as an effect of language; an instrument of power which is by no means innocent.

In fact, another one of the basic contributions of poststructuralism is its emphasis on the indissolubility of *power* and *knowledge*. Rather than as an external coercive force, power is thought to be dispersed across the social fabric, where it generates adhesion and perpetuates itself by reproducing microphysically through a multiplicity of representational practices.

**What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.  
(Foucault 1980: 119)**



Denying the existence of stable meanings and challenging the idea of neutrality in this intellectual framework—where every statement or action is discovered as potentially reinforcing or questioning prevailing orthodoxies—lends weight to calls to contextualise linguistic and cultural manifestations, beliefs, theories, and even knowledge. The goal of different proposals along this line is to shed light on



*Mythologies* by the dependence of seemingly indubitable certainties Roland Barthes on their historical and social contexts. Roland Barthes (1957). Cover. semiological method for the analysis of myths; the archaeological and genealogical approaches with which Michel Foucault aims at discovering the conditions for the appearance of 'things said'; Pierre Bourdieu's socioanalysis, and Derrida's deconstruction, to which another section of this entry is devoted, are just some of the interdisciplinary methodological frameworks suggested for unearthing not only 'meanings' but also the workings of the 'regimes of truth' within which these meanings crystallise into stable forms.

These assumptions are not only applied at object level in research, but are also extrapolated to the meta level. As opposed to the traditional view of knowledge as the discovery and possession of an objective truth, poststructuralism assumes the unfeasibility of adopting a position outside the very context and discourse within which theorisation is framed. In this sense, in opposition to the empirical paradigm that both proclaims and claims objectivity and impartiality as preconditions for knowledge, neutrality is declared to be impossible from the outset within this paradigm. The researcher as a subject therefore acquires a self-reflexive awareness of the contingency, situatedness, and inevitable partiality of scientific discourse. The investigation of power relations, hierarchies and exclusions is often perceived as an opportunity to engage with subjugated knowledge(s) and excluded points of view, with silenced voices and with identities that are made invisible or constructed as Others within and through discourse. Not surprisingly, poststructuralism is considered to have exerted a fundamental influence on authors linked to approaches interested in (subverting) the influence of (dominant) power and ideology, such as Norman Fairclough and other representatives of critical discourse analysis; prominent exponents of theoretical approaches which analyse contexts marked by sheer asymmetries,

for example [Homi K. Bhabha](#) in the field of [postcolonial studies](#); and authors who have argued for anti-essentialist visions of gender such as [Judith Butler](#).

The contributions made by both the major figures associated with poststructuralism and their most recognised successors have also had a notable influence on the recent development of translation studies. As will be explained in the following section, translation studies also shows a clear influence of those features which have been identified as 'defining' traits of this undefined tendency in favour of indefiniteness: the distrust of language understood as a mirror of reality; the importance of the context of reception in the construction of meaning; the interest in unearthing, through interdisciplinary methodologies, the conditions in which discourse is produced and the power relations within which it is embedded; the problematisation of the position of the enunciating subject, and the acceptance of the inevitably political nature of all discourses, including academic discourse.

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## **Poststructuralism in translation studies**

From a poststructuralist point of view, the development of theories and the evolution of ideas and knowledge are not to be seen as a chronologically ordered accumulation of findings that enlarge or displace pre-existing ones. Rather, theories and knowledge are conceived of as a succession of contradictions, overlaps and discontinuities that history later provides with logic, meaning, and order. This seems to be true when attempting to identify the presence of poststructuralism within translation studies, where it has been and can be perceived even before its emergence as a movement. In fact, reflections on and visions of translation proposed over the centuries

have been or can be aligned, in hindsight, with so-called poststructuralist thought. In any event, the influence of poststructuralism in the field of translation studies became clearly visible from the mid-1980s onwards and even more decisively from the early 1990s onwards. This occurred in parallel with the proliferation of very diverse approaches linked to the so-called 'cultural turn' and to other developments that have also been interpreted in terms of 'turns', such as the 'power', 'ideological' or 'critical turn' in TS. It is not to be forgotten that, rather than defining a systematic movement, the label 'poststructuralism' brings together a plethora of scattered and often partially contradictory ideas that, nevertheless, hint at a different intellectual climate—a paradigm shift—in a wide variety of disciplines, including translation studies. This idea is commonly stressed by specialised literature which has mapped the interplay between poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, and translation (Vidal 1995, 1998; Koskinen 2000, 2018; Alvarez 2000; Gentzler 2001, 2002; Boulanger [2002](#)).

Among the ideas discussed by 20<sup>th</sup>-century authors who, even prior to the rise of poststructuralism or situated far away from its geographical epicentre, were already talking about translation in ways that bring to mind subsequent poststructuralist positions are [Walter Benjamin](#)'s vision of translation as 'survival'; [Roman Jakobson](#)'s fluid and all-encompassing description of translation as an [intralingual, interlingual or intersemiotic](#) phenomenon, and [George Steiner](#)'s definition in [After Babel](#) of every act of understanding as translation—a statement which, by transforming every original into a rewriting, implies renouncing the belief in transcendental, fixed meanings and, therefore, the aspiration to univocal equivalence. In fact, the rise of poststructuralist theories in the field of translation can be linked to perspectives which, in contrast to the first systematic approaches to translational phenomena in the academic sphere, distanced

themselves from the search for equivalence as understood in absolute terms. While the approaches based in comparative linguistics and stylistics of the 1950s sought to define and identify the ideal conditions and strategies for attaining equivalence, descriptive translation studies (DTS) adopted a typically poststructuralist suspicion towards the possibility of one single interpretation and of universally valid formulae of cross-cultural transfer. Reacting against the prescriptivism of their precursors, DTS instead favoured research based on the observation of the actual circumstances which explain the particular ways in which translation temporarily fixes the meaning of texts within certain socio-historical frameworks. Toury's (1985: 19) much-quoted, and at the time revolutionary, definition of translation as a "fact of the target culture" can be seen to a certain extent as an acceptance of [Barthes](#)' announcement of the "death of the author" and as a sign of a quintessentially poststructuralist desire to disentangle the conditions of production for the formulae of 'faithfulness' that are considered to be acceptable or normative in different social contexts.

This typically poststructuralist relativisation of the source text, in contrast to a prior tradition which had long prioritised authorial intent, was not unique to DTS and, more generally, to systemic theories of translation (Hermans 1999). Other, more practice-oriented perspectives also demystified the original and emphasised the importance of acceptability and other factors pertaining to the target context. Prominent among these were proposals based on the concept of genre in textual linguistics; the concept of translation and interpreting as interpretive acts subject to expectations of naturalness and intelligibility in the target language posited by the *École du Sens* (Lederer 2003), and the view of translation as an informative offer in line with a specific purpose and for a specific audience in *skopos* theory (Nord 1998).

In any case, although poststructuralism can be identified as a driving force behind a general reorientation of translation studies towards the pole of reception that has been taking place since the mid-1970s, the influence of this movement became much more significant from the mid-1980s onwards.

**[A]ll translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose.**

**(Hermans 1985: 11)**

This declaration of principles from the so-called Manipulation School, a strand of research that partially overlaps with DTS, encapsulated much of poststructuralist scepticism towards the possibility of apprehending meaning in order to subsequently reproduce it unaltered. In the work of key authors such as André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett, translation was redefined in terms of rewriting—an act which inevitably reshapes and enlarges the original, refracting it even in self-contradictory ways.

**A writer's work gains exposure and achieves influence mainly through 'misunderstandings and misconceptions,' or, to use a more neutral term, refractions. Writers and their work are always understood and conceived against a certain background or, if you will, are refracted through a certain spectrum, just as their work itself can refract previous works through a certain spectrum.**

**(Lefevere 1982: 234)**

Following Lefevere and Bassnett's (1990) decisive advocacy of the so-called 'cultural turn', research on translation

became more concerned with uncovering the factors, agents, institutions and dynamics that condition the processes of rewriting, as well as their ideological implications and their role in the maintenance or subversion of the *status quo*. Translation came to be defined as a social practice (Venuti 1996) and as an inevitably political act (Álvarez and Vidal 1996). Based on these grounds, various approaches committed themselves to the goal of investigating, with the help of interdisciplinary methodologies, the extent to which translation may be subject to the influence of certain ideologies and how it may contribute to shaping them, as well as the ways in which it may be conditioned by existing power relations and may hinder, foster or contribute to their transformation.



*Meaning in translation, like light refracted through a prism [Source].*

**The cultural studies approach sees translations as carriers of ideological attitudes and studying translation as a way not only of uncovering those attitudes but of using the translation process to challenge hegemonic attitudes to society and culture. [...] The idea, then, is not just to give primacy to cultural issues or to be sensitive to them but to use translation, and the study of translation, as a weapon in fighting colonialism, sexism, racism, and so on.**

**(Baker 1996: 13-14)**

In this sense, a further dimension in which the influence of poststructuralism is discernible in translation studies is the qualitative shift in the perceived scope of applicability of the need to transcend the idea of neutrality. While the importance of taking into account the

influence of the receiving context in how meaning is understood and renegotiated gained acceptance in many research strands within translation studies as regards the object of study of translation research, from the 1990s onwards, certain approaches took on board the implications of this vision at the level of research itself.

**Culturally oriented research tends to be philosophically skeptical and politically engaged, so it inevitably questions the claim of scientific objectivity in empirically oriented work which focuses on forms of description and classification, whether linguistic, experimental, or historical.**

**(Venuti 2000: 335)**

The interest in discovering the interplay of translation and power, combined with a desire to contribute to the transformation of existing hierarchies, emerged in a very visible way in contexts and spheres marked by evident relations of hegemony and subordination.

**Translation [...] is thus brought into being in the colonial context in a complex field structured by law, violence, and subjectification, as well as by determinate concepts of representation, reality and knowledge.**

**(Niranjana 1992:165)**

Poststructuralist theories have proved to be a useful aid for tracking the complicity of translation in the consolidation of colonial regimes, in the perpetuation of relations of domination in postcolonial contexts (Niranjana 1992), and in the construction of certain subjectivities as exotic and stereotypical Others (Carbonell 1997). They have also offered a sound basis for both describing and advocating translation

as a space and a means of resistance and transformation—one with which to contest long-standing representations and their embedded hierarchies, to make new perspectives visible, and to give an active voice to other speaking subjects.

**[S]ince post-colonials already exist “in translation,” our search should not be for origins or essences but for a richer complexity, a complication of our notions of the “self,” a more densely textured understanding of who “we” are. It is here that translators can intervene to inscribe heterogeneity, to warn against myths of purity, to show origins as always fissured. Translation, from being a “containing” force” is transformed into a disruptive, disseminating one.**

**(Niranjana 1992:165)**

Poststructuralism has also been a mainstay of gender-based approaches to translation, which gained momentum in the discipline from the 1990s onwards, mainly thanks to the well-known feminist translation theories and practices developed in Canada and North America. With a typically poststructuralist or postmodern attitude towards language, authors such as [Barbara Godard](#), [Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood](#), [Marlene Wildeman](#) and [Suzanne Jill Levine](#) devoted efforts to uncovering and dismantling the heritage of patriarchy at the level of language and representations, and to exploring translation practices committed to making the feminine visible. More recently, poststructuralism has also served as a cornerstone of calls to problematise and even dispute the essentialist biases of these pioneering approaches (Arrojo 1994) and to advance towards new gender-conscious translation theorisations and practices which eschew binary oppositions and propose intersectional

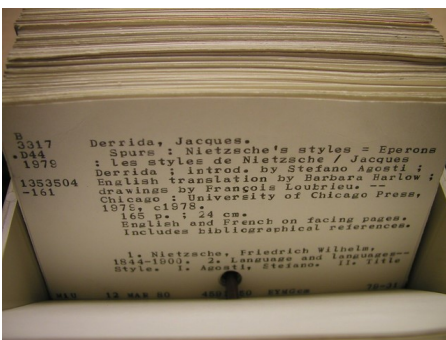


approaches in order to ethically engage with all kinds of gender identities and sexual orientations within a transnational framework.

In fact, because of the open-ended nature of poststructuralism, its influence is not restricted to certain 'schools', 'trends' or specific topics and fields. Poststructuralist ideas have permeated multiple research strands within the diversified field of translation-related research. In particular, they have served as an inspiration for studies based on sociological perspectives (Wolf and Fukari 2010) that aim to expose the ways in which translation and rewritings (as well as research on them) take part in the circulation and dissemination of certain narratives (Baker 2006) which, in turn, underpin certain visions and orders of reality. They have also been influential for research that brings to light the participation of translation in the maintenance of asymmetries in a wide range of socio-professional fields (Vidal 2010), as well as for studies that call for transformative models which address translation praxis and translation-related research as social engagement and activism (Maier and Boéri 2010; Gould and Tahmasebian 2020). All these approaches embrace the enduring concern of poststructuralism with ethics (Koskinen 2000) and its advocacy of a critical and self-reflexive attitude (Baker 2010).

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## 🔗 Deconstruction



One figure that stands out prominently within the blurred territory of poststructuralism is [Jacques Derrida](#), considered to be the father of [deconstruction](#), a critique of the 'history of ontology' and of '[Western metaphysics](#)'.

Since the 1980s, this philosophical approach has had a significant influence on many

*Catalogue card of one of*

*Derrida's works* [\[Source\]](#) disciplines and fields, within which it has encouraged a wide variety of approaches and proposals that show a profound distrust of unchanging essences and stable foundations. On the basis of a genuine commitment to exposing the mechanisms through which these become legitimised, [deconstruction](#) aims at showing the inherently undecidable character of [différance](#) by playfully engaging with the cracks and ambivalences to be found within established codes.

Deconstruction problematises the very idea of origin, worshipped for so long in the Western [logocentric](#) tradition. Rather than believing in transcendental presence and foundational meaning, it is based on the assumption that all practices and discursive acts refer to and contain the [traces](#) of others, and, in turn, contribute to dispersing and [disseminating](#) the variety of ways in which they can be understood. Every utterance is thought to be iterative, i.e., to accumulate [supplements](#) which, far from being secondary, (over)determine a meaning which can never be fully appropriated. At most, meaning is thought to take on a transitory shape in what Derrida calls *The Ear of the Other*, where it becomes amplified or restricted when merging with the interests, points of view, and concerns of the receiving pole. Deconstruction erases and questions the separation between reality and representation, original and derivative, identity and difference. Accordingly, it encourages the disavowal and suspicion of binary oppositions and of those limits which attempt to impose a closure on the irreducibility and polyphony of signification, which in any case is seen to exceed the dimension of mere [communication](#).

In this regard, even though—according to its critics—deconstruction promotes the free and arbitrary play of signifiers and a dangerous relativism, one of the priorities of its proponents is in fact to expose the mechanisms by which certain (incomplete and restrictive) interpretations come to be perceived as the correct and natural ones.

Thus, the aim pursued is to demystify and reveal the provisional nature of any boundaries that are taken for granted, for example those demarcating languages or identities. This is a first step towards subsequently destabilising and subverting said boundaries in order to fight against their hierarchies and exclusions, and towards unearthing what has been silenced. This concept is very visible in Jacques Derrida's work, which has dealt extensively with issues such as justice, hospitality or the role of the intellectual. Deconstruction is deeply concerned with ethics and responsibility. In any case, according to deconstructive logic, these are ideals which also need to be understood as non-renounceable demands and infinite aporias.

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## ¶ Deconstruction and/in translation

**[T]ranslation and deconstruction share the same stakes.**

**(Davis 2001: 1)**

Deconstruction and translation are closely linked; they are two elements that mutually reinforce one another within a critical relationship. Translation is a recurring theme in Derrida's work, particularly in widely-quoted essays such as *Des tours de Babel*, which, despite having been so widely translated, themselves defy translation. Furthermore, Derrida has gone so far as to identify—albeit not equating them fully—deconstruction with translation. In “Letter to a Japanese Friend”, he clarifies that “the impossible task of the translator’ [...] This too is meant by ‘deconstructs’.” Without any doubt, Derrida considers translation to be one of the methods or attitudes with which to abandon the possibility



*Deconstruction's critical and sceptical gaze* [\[Source\]](#)

of grasping meaning and of establishing full correspondences. In this sense, translation becomes a tool with which to find supplements to our preconceived views and ideas beyond that which is established by convention. Conversely, translation, a term with multiple meanings and expressions, is also likely to be deconstructed itself.

Deconstruction makes it possible to bring to light the associations that translation, in its most common meanings and practices, weaves with particular ideas, ideologies, projects, powers and agendas, and ultimately enables us to (re)think it differently. For this purpose, dominant 'translation regimes' need to be historicised and problematised in order to be subsequently subverted and transformed.

Many are the authors who have emphasised a whole range of interrelations and synergies between deconstruction and the field of translation (van den Broeck 1988; Arrojo 1993; Vidal 1995; Koskinen [1994](#); Gentzler 2001; Davis 2001). During the process in which translation became established as a discipline in its own right, Derrida's views on translation proved to be helpful in claiming that translation is not to be understood as a secondary or derivative activity, but as a productive force that is crucial in the construction of cultures and worldviews. They were also inspiring for approaches committed to detecting the complicity of translation in prejudiced and excluding hierarchies, and to exploring and advocating alternative representational practices, among them non-ethnocentric models with which to overcome the risks of acculturation and assimilation (Niranjana 1992). As a case in point, Derrida's theories have offered a suggestive basis upon which to creatively disseminate the experimental texts of deconstruction itself in other linguistic and cultural coordinates—(transl)authors such as [Gayatri Spivak](#) provide evidence of this—and to explain their reception in different contexts (Gallop [1994](#); Thomas 2006; Ottoni and Ferreira 2006). They have also provided a critical angle from which to re-examine the

expectations and norms surrounding translation in different socio-professional fields, such as legal translation (Vidal and Martín Ruano 2003), as well as inspiring insights for exploring different, bold ways of renegotiating the differences and relationships between those which are aprioristically considered to be separate languages, cultures, and identities (Siscar and Carneiro Rodrigues [2000](#)). As a philosophy unwaveringly committed to self-reflexive critique, deconstruction is an ally for translation, helping it to continue rethinking itself ceaselessly, and to relentlessly revisit its borders, the ideas and constructs on which it is based, the norms and hierarchies it takes for granted, and the power relations it may reinforce, perhaps inadvertently and unconsciously. Deconstruction also serves as a stimulus to explore the potentialities of translation beyond its supposed limits, beyond well-established models and beyond reductionist dichotomies and understandings. It offers a springboard for proactively seeking out new avenues which, in any case, will always require self-reflexive criticism and further fine-tuning; in other words, which will be in constant need for deconstruction and (re)translation.

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## **Research potential**

Poststructuralism and deconstruction have helped translation studies to revisit long-standing views on translation that have been shaped over the centuries, as well as to propose other narratives (Baker 2006) with which to explain translational phenomena and with which to (re)define current translation practices.

Through the prism of these theories, translation has come to be seen as a never innocent social activity that plays a central, productive role in reinforcing or redesigning existing power relations and particular ideological, cultural, and social orders. The tenets associated with

these trends continue to be inspirational for further acknowledging the often unquestioned complicity of translation and rewritings with wider processes—which are never innocent and are generally asymmetrical (Vidal 2010)—in which languages, cultures and subjectivities are constructed. Additionally, they also enable translation and translation-related research to be approached as potentially destabilising and transformative forces, as sites of agency, and as critical exercises that may resist those prevailing models that are accepted as natural. This becomes especially important in the ethnodiverse, hybrid, deterritorialised, transnational and interconnected social landscapes of the contemporary global era. Taking into account that many of the binary oppositions that underlie our approaches to reality and translation have become outdated, it is vital to reflect on how to articulate non-essentialist translation practices in accordance with the features of these transformed scenarios. Poststructuralist and deconstructionist ideas also continue to be extremely relevant in the digital era, where it is obvious that the democratisation of machine translation and increasingly automated translation processes often facilitate intercultural dialogue yet, at the same time, dangerously encourage an illusion of instant intelligibility. In this context, it is crucial to continue to contest idealistic views of language and translation as mere vehicles at the service of communication, as encouraged by Venuti (2019) in *Contra Instrumentalism*, and to scrutinise, as proposed by Baumgarten and Cornellà-Detrell (2019: 17), “newly emerging yet constantly shifting hierarchies of power within the context of the digital economy of translation”.

Translation is a label that continually seeks definition in always new and ever-changing scenarios. Poststructuralism and deconstruction offer translation a basis and an incentive for finding the values of the variables which satisfy the ‘responsibility’ equation in particular settings. For Derrida, ‘responsibility’ can only prove to be ethical if, when deconstructed, it shows its complex and aporetic nature. In this

regard, the 'responsibility' towards prevailing expectations and norms can also be read as "response-ibility" (Koskinen 2000: 95), i.e., as the unceasing demand for critically reassessing those expectations and norms in response to the specificities and possibilities of particular contexts.

La traducción es una etiqueta en busca de definición en entornos que, por otra parte, están en perpetua evolución. El posestructuralismo y la deconstrucción brindan a la traducción una base y un aliciente para calibrar la ecuación variable de esa "responsabilidad" que para Derrida solo puede ser ética si se deconstruye y muestra su naturaleza compleja y aporética: esa "responsibility" para con las expectativas y normas vigentes que también puede leerse como "response-ibility" (Koskinen 2000: 95), como su necesaria e incesante revisión crítica en respuesta a las singularidades y posibilidades de los contextos particulares.

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