

## **Guidance on writing a proposal for the PhD in Literary Translation Studies**

There is no single “right way” to present a research proposal but the following tips are indicative of good practice. Proposals should be a succinct 500 words and include a list of works cited (which may be brief and make use of any referencing style). It is advisable to draft a proposal and share it with your prospective supervisor and the Warwick Writing Programme’s Director of Graduate Studies before submitting your formal application to the University. A promising proposal is not, however, a guarantee that an applicant will be admitted to the programme; it will be considered alongside the other elements of the application, including your academic credentials.

Please note that the funding bodies, e.g. M4C, generally have their own proposal templates and will require you to structure your funding proposal and other supporting statements according to these templates. You are advised to identify potential funders and familiarise yourself with their application requirements at an early stage in the PhD application process. If you are admitted to the PhD programme and move onto the funding application stage, then you will need to restructure and augment your Warwick proposal as necessary and appropriate when it comes to filling out your funding application.

Information about the M4C scheme can be found here:

<https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/>

Applicants are strongly advised to attend one of the M4C preparatory workshops offered in the autumn.

Warwick’s Doctoral College offers advice about other funding opportunities here:

[https://warwick.ac.uk/services/dc/schols\\_fund/](https://warwick.ac.uk/services/dc/schols_fund/)

## Proposal Guidance - Research Pathway

### ***Initial summary:***

The first sentence or two should clearly summarise the project and tell the reader what it is you are intending to do. You will undoubtedly need to repeat and expand on some of this information in the rest of the proposal, but it is problematic if the reader is not immediately given a clear sense of what the project is about.

### ***Research questions and contextualisation of the project within Translation Studies:***

The proposal should also relatively swiftly state what your research questions are and what the expected contribution of the research will be: how is it innovative and in what respect does it represent a new departure in terms of subject matter, theoretical and/or methodological approach etc.? What does it bring to Translation Studies? Where does it fit in terms of existing concerns, research avenues, directions? Are there perhaps synergies with other disciplines: Applied Linguistics, Comparative Literature, Philosophy, Modern Languages? The proposal should also clearly state whether the project is historical, philosophical, theoretical, methodological, sociological and/or practice-based in its approach. What does the research ultimately hope or expect to establish? There will necessarily be an element of speculation about outcomes at this stage but it nonetheless important to reflect upon the potential end result.

### ***Methodology:***

Please say something about your methodology. If the project is text-based, which methods will you be using to analyse your texts? If the project is theoretical, which theories will inform your work and/or how will you put your theories to the test? If the project involves fieldwork, archival research, interviews with human subjects or data collection, explain how this will work, which archives you will need to visit etc. You should mention whether it is likely that you will need ethics clearance (normally required when you are working with human subjects and/or data collection).

### ***Person and preparedness:***

Please say something about your preparedness to carry out this research project: your academic background (if you are coming to Translation Studies from another discipline, you may wish to comment on your familiarity with the field and the reason for your move from one field to another), the languages that you speak, any relevant professional or other experience, any publications/published literary translations (please note that publications are not necessary or essential, however). You should also mention why you are applying to Warwick. This section will likely be shorter than the previous sections.

## Proposal Guidance - Practice-based Pathway

Please review the guidance for the research pathway as elements of this guidance will also be relevant for the practice-based pathway. It is important to grasp the nature of a PhD in translation by practice when formulating the proposal. The notes below offer some help with this.

### ***Initial summary:***

The first sentence or two should clearly summarise the project and tell the reader what it is you are intending to do. You will undoubtedly need to repeat and expand on some of this information in the rest of the proposal, but it is problematic if the reader is not immediately given a clear sense of what the project is about. This section should certainly include the original title and author of the work(s) that you propose to translate, a working English title, the language from which you are translating, an indication of whether this will be a first translation or a re-translation, and a brief comment on why it is important that this work be translated or retranslated into English. The rationale for translation can then be expanded upon in subsequent paragraphs.

### ***Research questions and methodology:***

Questions that you may like to address include the following:

- **Why are you translating or re-translating this text?**

Has it been translated before? If it has been translated before, then why are you proposing a re-translation (this may have to do with insufficiencies in previous translations, but it may also reflect your desire to attempt something new or to explore a particular approach to translation; the latter may also apply to a first translation of a text)? For a PhD project, the text selection should be convincing. As part of the thesis you will be required to write a critical reflection to accompany the translation; the source text and the issues that it raises for the translator have to be significant enough to provide material for reflection and discussion (this does not imply that the text has to be canonical but there should certainly be something “interesting” or challenging about it). Your answer to the question of why you are translating your chosen text should be informed by the answers to the following questions, and should certainly be less subjective and more analytical than “I liked it” ...

- **Where does the text come from and where is it going? Who are you addressing?**

Do you, as Spivak argues should be the case, have “a tough sense of the specific terrain of the original” (1993:188)? In other words, do you have sense of where this text slots into its

source culture? Of its position in the home literature? Have you, as Venuti argues should be the case, engaged with “the cultural conditions of the translating” (2011:247)? Have you thought about what it means to transplant this text at this moment? Or what it means to re-translate this text at this particular time? Who will its audience be? How will it shape the target culture’s perception of the source culture and its literature?

- **What do you think your priorities will be when translating this text?**

Fidelity to the source? In what way? The creation of a ‘successful’ target text? Considerations of audience? Creative self-expression? Experimentation? Revolution? Were you motivated humanistically and/or ideologically?

This section may also include a statement about methodology. Which method or approach will you adopt to analyse your source text and translate it into English?

- **What do you hope or expect to establish or achieve through the translation of this text?**

There will necessarily be an element of speculation about outcomes at this stage but it is nonetheless important to conceive of the potential end result or contribution. What does the project bring to Translation Studies and/or the reader and/or the translator and/or the text?

***Person and preparedness:***

Please say something about your preparedness to carry out this research project: your academic background (if you are coming to Translation Studies from another discipline, you may wish to comment on your familiarity with the field and the reason for your move from one field to another), the languages that you speak, any relevant professional or other experience, any publications/published literary translations (please note that publications are not necessary or essential, however). You should also mention why you are applying to Warwick. This section will likely be shorter than the previous sections.

## ***A note on the nature of a critical reflection on translation***

The overall shape of a practice-based thesis should still be that of a conventional thesis, i.e. the thesis should begin by introducing and justifying the translation project, providing any necessary contextualisation for the reader. The translation should be included in the body of the thesis at an appropriate point. The thesis must not fall into two halves (i.e. it should not place the translation first and follow it with the reflection) as the reader then has no sense of what sort of translation has been done and why: the aim of the reflection is to affect how the translation is read. Just as will be the case for a conventional thesis, the order of the text, which includes the positioning of the translation, should be shaped by the argument being made. These are important factors to bear in mind when constructing a practice-based thesis proposal.

### ***What a critical reflection on a translation (for the purposes of the PhD in Literary Translation Studies) should NOT be***

It is not a commentary in the Classicist or Nabokovian mode, i.e. it should not be comprised of notes on or annotations to a text.

It should not be a chronological/biographical narrative of translating a text, i.e. the shape of the reflection should not be determined by the order of the text but rather by your argument(s).

It should not apply translation theory, since one cannot apply a theory (a theory, whether of translation or of any other phenomenon, can be tested and can influence practice, but cannot be straightforwardly applied).

### ***What a critical reflection on a translation (for the purposes of the PhD in Literary Translation Studies) should be***

The link between the translation and the critical reflection, i.e. how far the translation bears out what is said in the reflection, will be central to the success of this piece of work.

The reflection should do the following:

- it should contain an argument or a set of arguments that are illustrated by the translation;
- it should address relevant issues of translation theory and practice;

- it should open up the process of theoretically informed reflection that lies behind the creation of a translation product.

Any piece of academic work benefits from a clear introduction that holds the reader's hand somewhat. In your commentary, a good, basic introduction to the text, author and context will set things up nicely. This should precede the translation. Additionally, please bear the following points in mind:

- illustrate your arguments/points with specific textual examples;
- engage with the literary criticism on your text/author/the genre. This will inevitably raise issues that will influence your thinking;
- there is always something (and usually quite a lot) to be said about style and its translation (cf. Boase-Beier 2011, 2015, 2020 [2006]).

## **References**

Boase-Beier, J., 2011. *A Critical Introduction to Translation Studies*. London: Continuum.

Boase-Beier, J., 2015. *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust*. London: Bloomsbury.

Boase-Beier, J., 2020 [2006]. *Translation and Style [formerly Stylistic Approaches to Translation]*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Spivak, G.C., 1992. The Politics of Translation. In: G.C. Spivak, 1993. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. London and New York: Routledge. pp.179-200.

Venuti, L., 2011. Towards a Translation Culture. In: L. Venuti, 2013. *Translation Changes Everything*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp.231-248.

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