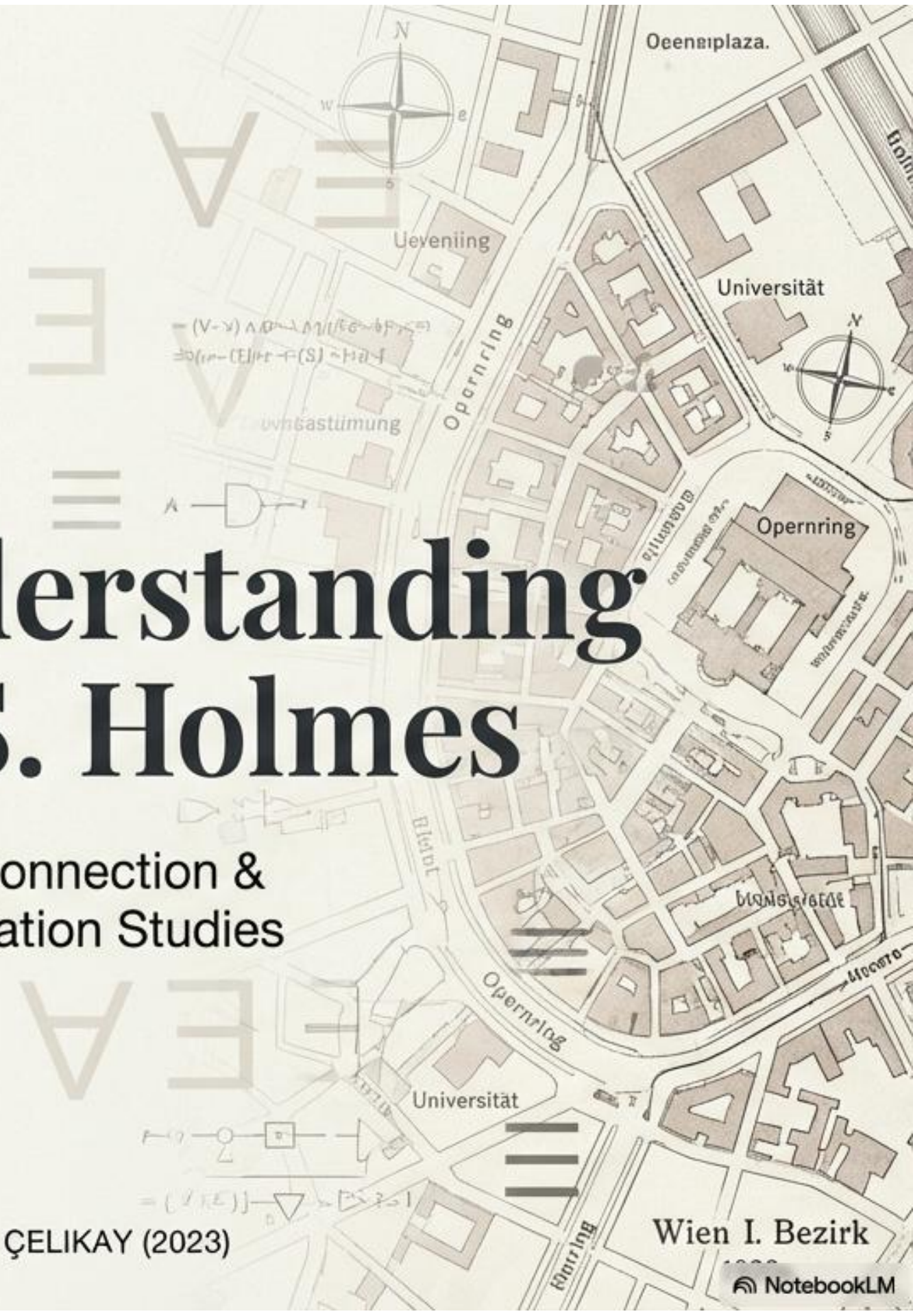




Re-Understanding James S. Holmes

The Vienna Circle Connection &
The Roots of Translation Studies

BASED ON THE RESEARCH OF MUSTAFA KARTAL ÇELİKAY (2023)



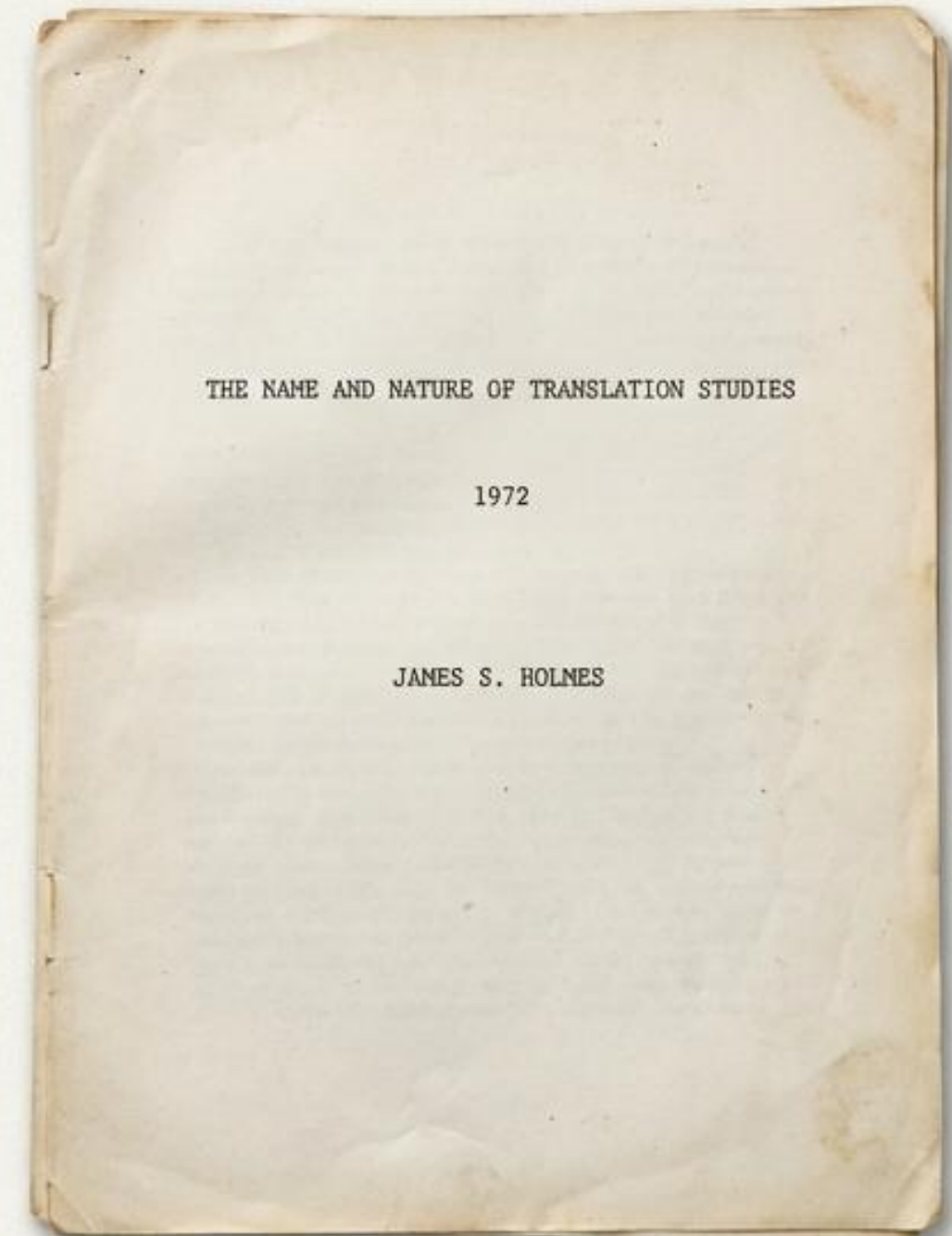
The Established Perception

James S. Holmes (1924–1986)

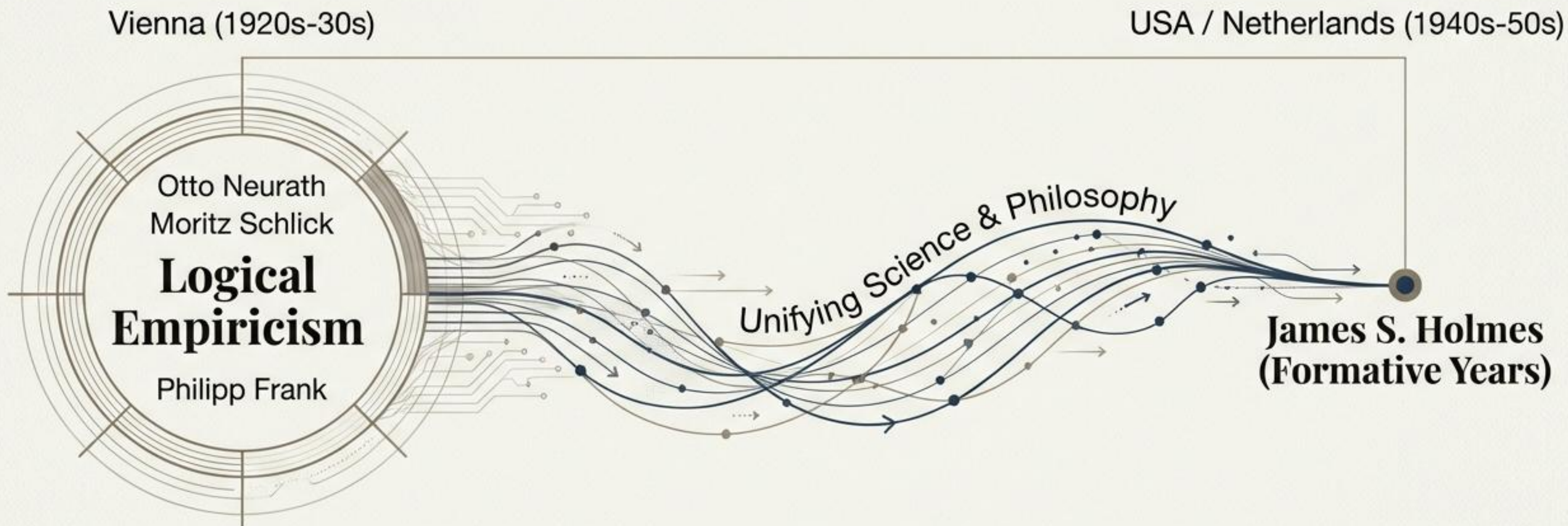
The 'Founding Father' of the field.
Celebrated for mapping the discipline
in his seminal 1972 paper.

The Conflict:

Despite this 'map,' the field today remains
fragmented. We have read Holmes as a
pragmatist, missing his deeper scientific
intent.



The Missing Link: The Vienna Circle



The Goal: To strip away metaphysics and focus strictly on what can be empirically verified through logical analysis.

Defining an Empirical Discipline

**“Translation studies is,
as no one I suppose
would deny, an
empirical discipline.”**

— James S. Holmes (1972)



The Source: Carl G. Hempel
(Vienna Circle Member)

Hempel's Criteria for Empiricism:

1. Describe specific phenomena in the world of experience.
2. Establish general principles to explain and predict them.

Holmes did not use the word “empirical” casually; he was citing a rigorous philosophical framework.

The Language of Logic

Everyday language is too messy for science. The Vienna Circle argued that true science requires a 'Symbolic Formalization'—a pure, formal language.

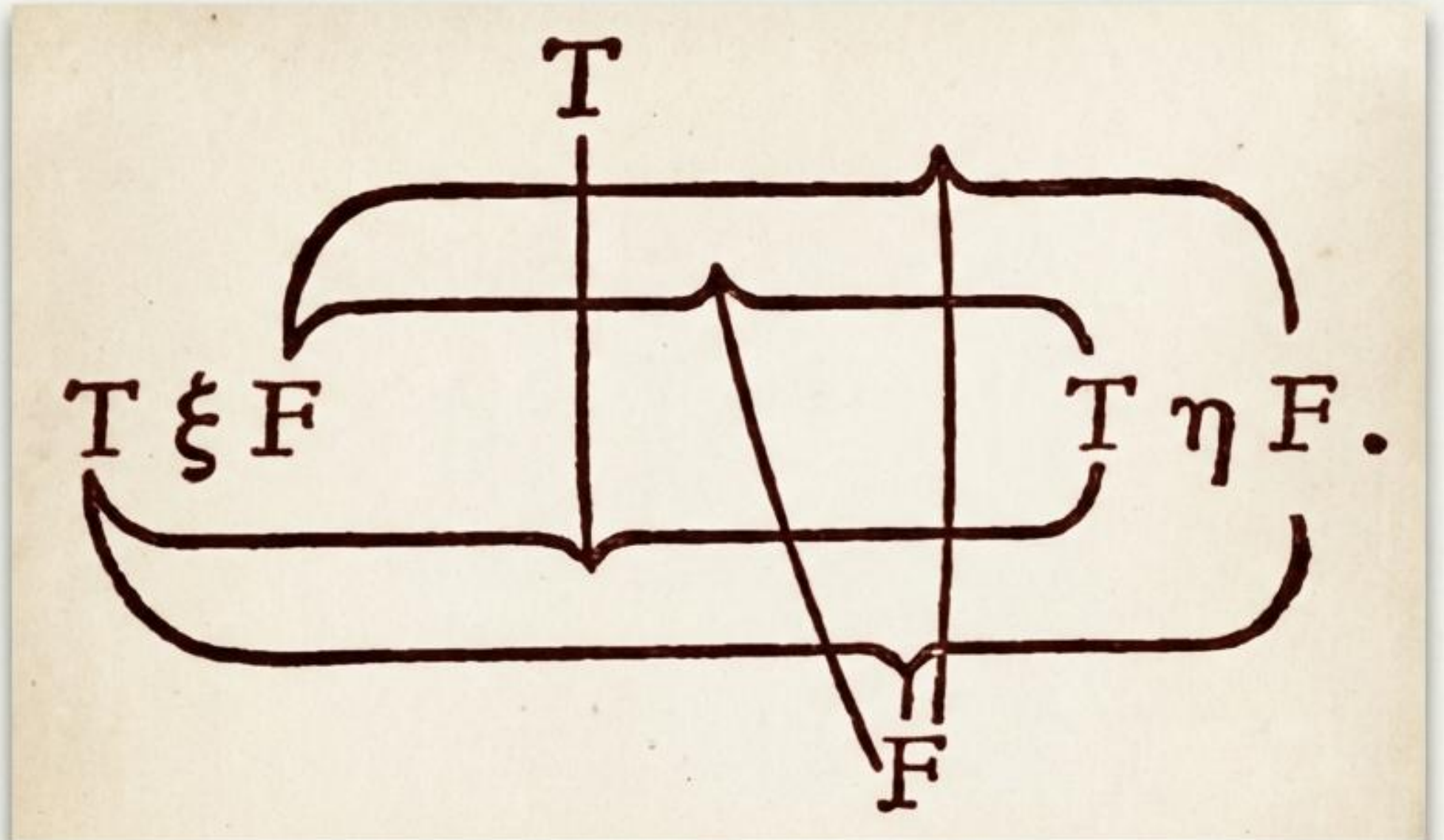


Fig A. Ludwig Wittgenstein's visualization of logical sentence structures from 'Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus'. A move toward pure abstraction.

Formalizing the Abstract

Carl G. Hempel's Logical Notation for "Fragility"

$$(D) Fx \equiv (t)(Sxt \supset Bxt)$$

Hempel did not use adjectives to define qualities. He used symbolic logic. This is the intellectual environment Holmes inhabited. He viewed definition as a mathematical act.

Holmes Adopts the Formal Model

Source Author to Source Message.

The diagram illustrates the Formal Model of Translation. It features a light beige rectangular box containing the formal expression $S_A \rightarrow M_A \rightarrow R_A \stackrel{TR}{=} S_B \rightarrow M_B \rightarrow R_B$. A red arrow points from the text 'Source Author to Source Message.' above to the M_A term. Another red arrow points from the text 'Translator becomes the new Source.' below to the M_B term.

$$S_A \rightarrow M_A \rightarrow R_A \stackrel{TR}{=} S_B \rightarrow M_B \rightarrow R_B$$

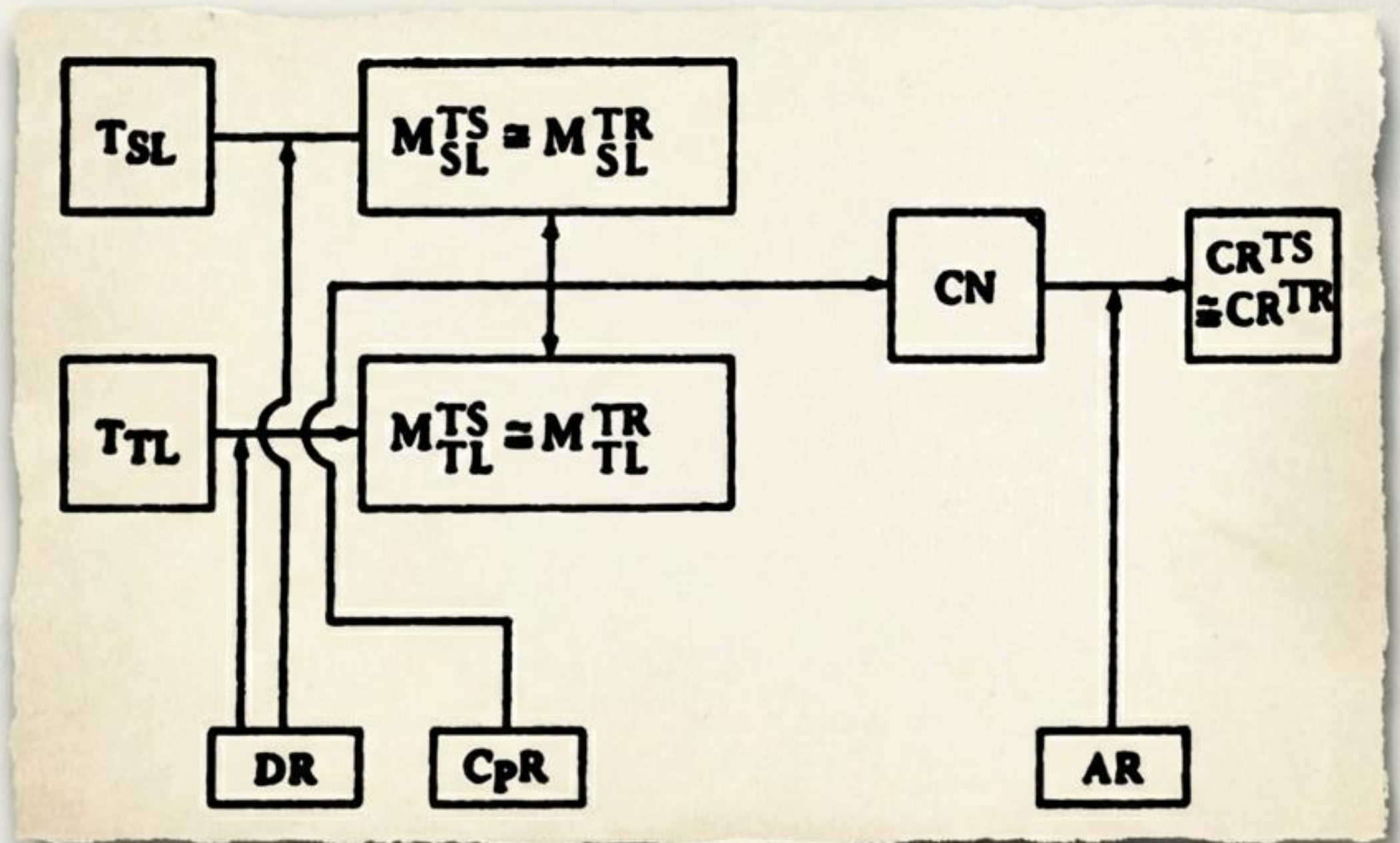
Translator becomes the new Source.

Holmes abandons prose for the “Language of Logic.” This is not a doodle; it is an attempt to create a universal, empirical syntax for translation.

The Descriptive Mechanism

TSL: Target Source Language
TTL: Target Target Language
Map: The mental conception
of the text

A Cybernetic Machine:
Holmes visualizes translation
not as a mystical creative act,
but as a complex, multi-stage
processing system.



Pure Theory vs. Applied Practice

The Vienna Stance

Axioms (Pure Theory) must be separated from Application. A theory is a self-contained logical system, distinct from the real world.

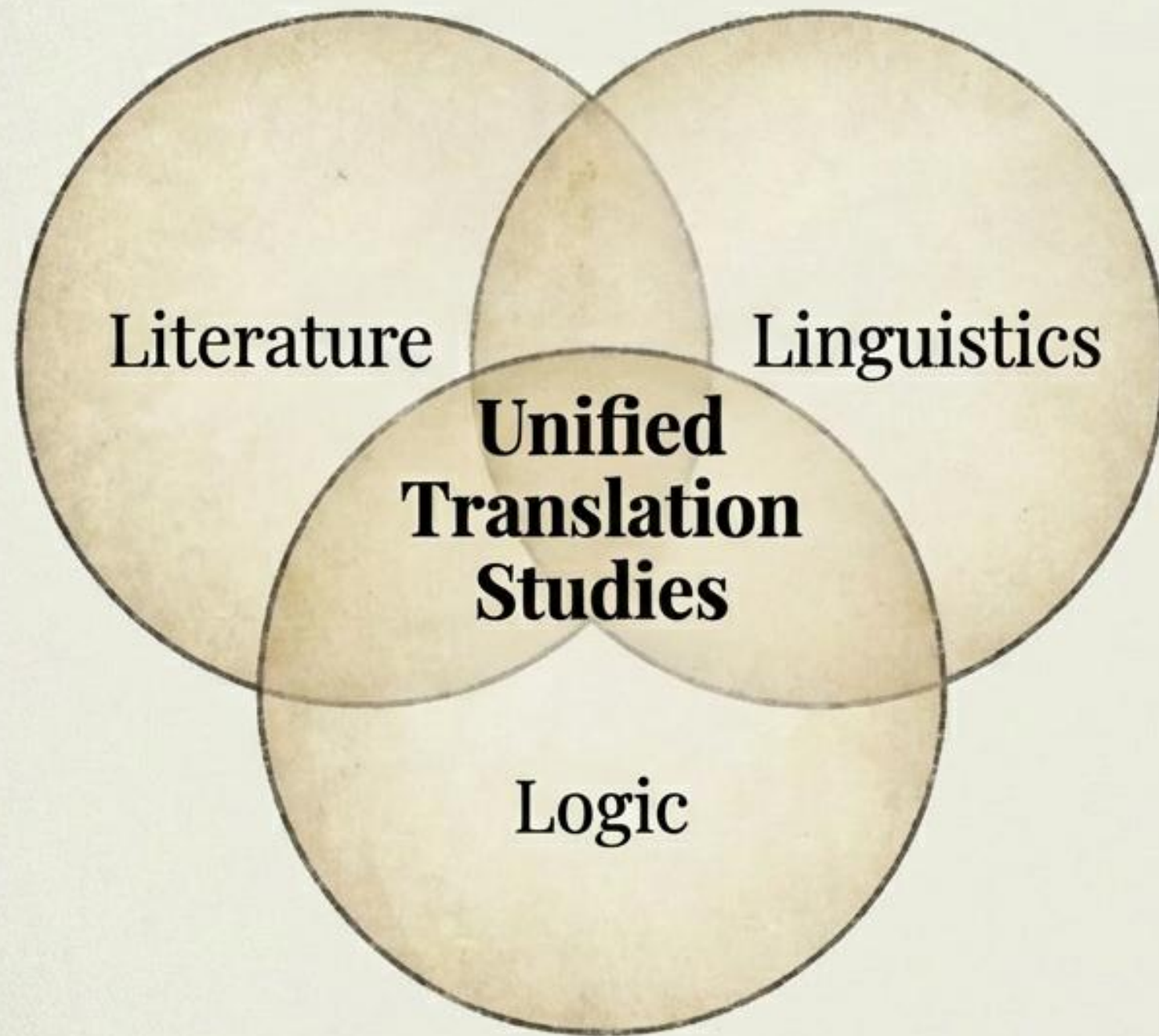
The Holmes Stance

Strictly separated “Pure” Translation Studies from “Applied”.

“Helping the translator need not be a main aim of translation studies.” — Holmes, 1977

This was not dismissal; it was scientific discipline.

The Drive for Unification



Goal: A Shared Terminology

Action: Holmes organized the Amsterdam Symposia

Key Figures: Gideon Toury, Itamar Even-Zohar, Anton Popovič

Impact: Scholars from different nations began speaking a common scientific language

The Birth of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS)

PRESCRIPTIVE (Pre-Holmes)



Enforcing rules.
Telling people *how* to translate.

DESCRIPTIVE (Post-Holmes)



Observing phenomena.
Studying *how* translation happens.

Holmes provided the 'clear thinking' that allowed scholars to move beyond subjective debates and treat translation as an empirical object of study.

The ‘Clear Thinker’



Path Forward

To solve the current fragmentation in Translation Studies, we must return to Holmes's original intent:

- 1. A shared logical language.
- 2. Empirical observation.
- 3. Meta-theoretical discussion.

James S. Holmes was not just a poet.
He was a conduit for Logical Positivism in the humanities.

Source Material

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