

Chapter 29

Toward a philosophy of translation

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Introduction

This chapter examines the different attempts at articulating a philosophy of translation as reflected in the discipline of Translation Studies (TS) and related disciplines. Following a definition of what a philosophy of translation strives to be, a review of past works on the topic will lay out the background of current research in this field. The chapter will next engage with some critical views on relevant contributions, and then outline some objectives and tasks of a future philosophy of translation.

Historical perspectives

Early in its development, TS apparently abandoned the tempting quest for a general theory (Holmes 2004). Approaches to translation have since evolved without any unifying model being explicitly proposed. Jean-René LADMIRAL suggested, speaking only of theorems (1978), i.e. fragments of theories that are to be applied in a casuistic manner. Over fifty years ago, the “linguistic turn” was initiated; the “cultural turn” occurred some twenty years later, and, most recently, some have called the reliance on sociological theories in TS the “sociological turn” (Pym 2010, Wolf & Fukari 2007, Snell-Hornby 2006, Inghilleri 2005, Tyulenev 2014). This account is subject to challenge, however – take, for instance, Rainier Grutman’s assertion (2009) that nothing really new has been devised since Even-Zohar and Toury in the 1970s and 1980s.

But TS has certainly evolved, and during this evolution translation as an object of study has increasingly moved from being viewed as a linguistic transfer 'process' to being seen as a final 'product', sometimes to be compared to its source text, sometimes to other (re)translations. However, the study of translation as a process has not been abandoned, and in more recent TS scholarship such study typically occurs within sociological investigations that seek to uncover how the social production of translations unfolds (Simeoni 1998, Hermans 1999, Casanova 2007, Heilbron 1999, Gouanvic 2005, Buzelin 2005, Sapiro 2008, Tyulenev 2012). The process can also be found in cognitive science (Gutt 1991), in neurophysiology (Kurz 1994) or in more recent studies on the neuroscience of translation (Tymoczko 2012), which investigate the representation of translational activities in the brain.

Critical issues and topics

Notwithstanding these debates around the process and the product of translation, as well as the shift from an earlier focus on the text to the more recent emphasis on the agent (Chesterman 2009), a properly philosophical approach to translation has been rather scarce in TS. A probable reason may be that other than linguists, comparative literature scholars, and other neighbouring disciplinary affiliates, scholars trained in philosophy did not integrate the field into their scholarship or choose to investigate its potential. Perhaps the wider horizons of philosophical investigations have proven to be more appealing or more open than TS to a larger diversity of objects of study.

Another reason for this reservation may be a paradox affecting the nature of translation: on the one hand, translation epitomizes a casuistic activity that can hardly submit itself to generalizations—hence the theorems of Ladmiral (1978) and the absence of a general theory (Holmes 2004). At the same time, translation constitutes one of the specific disciplines of the humanities and therefore is subject to some degree of generalization due to the need to conform to the conventions of academic research (Passeron & Revel 2005; Lacour & Campos 2005).

“Thinking by case”, according to Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel, is a possible effect of an “underground epistemological revolution” (Passeron & Revel, 2005: 15) that may have disconnected the humanities from their positivist approach in favor of a more flexible one, like that of constructivism. If the singularity of a translation can symbolize the status of a case-study and the peculiarity of its reflexive process in the humanities, then consequently translation has the potential to become an epistemological exemplar and play a role in the shaping of an entire epistemic culture (Knorr Cetina 1999).

In order to explore that potential and the extent to which translation can expand its semantic field, the task of defining TS’s object of study needs to be undertaken from a philosophical perspective. In other words, if the concept of translation is to be understood beyond its traditional (western) sense of meaning transfer, then the philosophical task of definition would entail a broader perspective, situating translation in a wider ontological framework or perceiving it from a bird’s-eye vantage point. However, although this task of definition usually takes place within philosophy, TS should bear the responsibility for

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this inquiry in order to "lift the most pertinent aspects of the philosophical debate into our own discipline and add the philosophy of translation to Holmes' map...", so much so that Kirsten Malmkjær "would like to see it as a branch of Translation Studies in its own right" (2010: 202).

As another indication of the breadth of the concept and its ability to overcome its own semantic limitations, translation has been widely used in different fields as a metaphor (Guldin 2015). In that capacity, it can be used to portray processes as diverse as genetic decoding (molecular biology), dream interpretation (psychoanalysis), transfer and exchange of knowledge (medical research), as well as the change of internet protocol addresses (networking), TV or radio retransmission (broadcasting), and property transfer (law), among many other still unexplored fields. However, despite the significant conceptual expansion that the figurative use of translation is offering, it—at least as demonstrated by Rainer Guldin (2015)—has not yet revealed its philosophical functions or scope.

Additionally, it can be noted that translation is also used metaphorically in daily speech as in, for example, "this idea must be translated into concrete action". According to Kobus Marais (2014), however, these translational metaphors have only played a marginal role in translation theory. His observation may be challenged by the ubiquity of the "metaphors we live by" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and by keeping in mind how daily language is pervaded by them, as is even the very process by which we think (Fauconnier

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& Turner 2002,2008). This thought should trigger our philosophical curiosity and lead us to reflect on the reasons that will be explored later in this chapter.

Current contributions and research

The above overview does not indicate where an actual “philosophy of translation” could be found. The reason is that neither the earlier mapping of TS (Holmes 2004) nor the latest (van Doorslaer, 2007) accounts for a subcategory of this denomination. Therefore, within the discipline the topic ‘philosophy of translation’ exists only in fragments, i.e. articles and parts thereof (e.g. Ladmiral, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1997, 2010; Tymoczko, 2007; Weissbrod, 2009; Malmkjær, 2010; Blumczynski, 2016). For example, in *Sourcier ou cibliste. Les profondeurs de la traduction* [Source our Target-oriented. The Depths of Translation], Ladmiral (2014) philosophizes the practice of translation rather than reflecting philosophically on the concept of translation and its potential ability to reshape the whole discipline. As a result, no matter how philosophical his approach may appear, he does not relate translation to wider conceptual, disciplinary, or primary matters of intellectual life that must transcend the immanent and narrow preoccupations of language transfer and its prescriptions. Philosophizing the activity of translating thus does not necessarily imply the advent of a philosophy of translation.

But there is an exception to this state of affairs. The only book in translation that has announced itself as a “philosophy of translation”—though not in its title—is Marais (2014). Considering the singular status of Marais’ work and its potential impact (which

will be explored later in this chapter), the question that should be answered is whether there should be any space allocated to a philosophy of translation *inside* the discipline.

While the philosophy of translation does not seem to occupy much territory within TS, it has for much longer played a greater role in philosophy. When philosophy needed to tackle the complexities of language and interpretation, it often adopted translation as a particular object of study of its own (Heidegger 1996, Derrida 1985; Ricoeur 1996; Jervolino 2006 & 2008; A. Benjamin 1989; Sallis 2002; Gadamer 2004; Quine 2013; Davidson 1984). (See Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9.) Whether in the revelation of paradoxes of language, or as an heuristic conceptual tool to better understand other interpretive processes in language and culture, translation has served as an inexhaustible cognitive device that puts common beliefs in perspective, and explains what superficial perceptions would not permit us to apprehend. But one should not confuse the mere appeal to translation in philosophy of language, hermeneutics or analytical philosophy (as illustrated by the above-cited authors) with a hypothetical philosophy of translation. More promising is the fact that the very role of translation moves in the former group from being a supporting (pedagogical) subject of reflection to a core object of study, although a philosophy of translation cannot content itself with taking place within the boundaries of only one or a few disciplines but would necessarily venture to expand its field of investigation to all.

One would expect philosophy, more than other disciplines, to model intellectual flexibility by revealing its verbal-centric propensity and to have a certain measure of

transdisciplinary porosity in order to explore many fields of knowledge and even some uncharted territories of the translational concept. However, it has so far been primarily deepening the arcana of language, together with some of its specific features and uses (e.g. metaphors). On the other hand, not only have philosophers naturally tended to view matters through their particular philosophical *Weltanschauung* (Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida, Ricoeur), they have also been seldom interested in thoughts specific to non-philosophical disciplines, unless these contributed to their own arguments. The question then turns back to TS: what stance should it take with regard to the philosophical dimensions offered by the translational concept?

As a possible response, it could be argued that TS is still a growing discipline that has not reached its limits or its latest stages of maturation. Therefore, it is to be expected that it would initially go through some deep crises—which it may already be starting to undergo—before it reaches the degree of maturity required to move to a new paradigm (Kuhn, 1996). Some signs of unrest may already be detected with the most recent studies trying to stir the more established categories that TS has been working with and building upon for the last few decades (Basalamah 2016).

A case in point is Michael Cronin's *Eco-Translation* (2017), whose titular concept "covers all forms of translation thinking and practice that knowingly engage with the challenges of human-induced environmental change" (2017: 2). Although not explicitly introducing itself as a philosophical investigation, Cronin's book is nevertheless a daring and creative effort to explore a new research territory that TS has never delved into. It

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should be kept in mind that one "task of the philosopher is...to express in coherent meaningful terms what is usually only implicit in the way we live.... [or to describe] this effort that draws the boundary line between practice and theory, between understanding life and living it" (Macmurray 1936: 2-3). Viewed through this lens, *Eco-Translation* could be considered a philosophical undertaking in its own right. In urging humanity to embrace post-anthropocentrism, the notion of eco-translation develops an overarching scope that does amount to a philosophy of life more generally, but does not address directly enough the conceptual stakes of a philosophy of translation.

Another example may be the most recent work of Piotr Blumczynski (2016), which is more directly philosophical. Drawing on the reflections of Stefano Arduini and Siri Neergard (2011) in their inaugural issue of the online journal *Translation*, Blumczynski's book "attempts to demonstrate the epistemological potential of translation...[and] aspires to a truly transdisciplinary endeavor in that it draws from and makes connections to various disciplines" (Blumczynski 2016: Introduction § 4). This book is a conceptual study of translation which attempts to "claim new territories for translation" (Introduction § 9) by "applying a translational interpretant . . . to insights originally formulated in other areas" (Introduction § 5). Blumczynski shows the flexibility of the translation concept and how translation can be found in many fields of knowledge, provided one is capable of seeing the potential of its applicability beyond initial disciplinary boundaries. However, it should be noted that while this conceptual investigation is presented as a journey through four disciplines of the humanities only, Chapter 5, which focuses on anthropology and ethnography, inexplicably ventures into the social sciences.

Additionally, philosophy (Chapter 2) is only a part of the entire demonstration, not the study's overarching focus. As such, philosophy cannot be the lens through which the study considers its subject and at the same time one of the areas where translation occurs under different guises—in this case hermeneutics, understanding and interpretation. Finally, Blumczynski's work does not even constitute the inception of a philosophy of translation in TS but is simply a "translational methodology" (Blumczynski Ch. 1 § 7) aimed at "chasing translation through several different fields" (Blumczynski, Introduction § 11) and spotting it virtually everywhere. In other words, like Guldin (2015), who has tracked the metaphor of translation as used in other disciplines, even beyond the humanities, Blumczynski's book is yet another strong indication that conceptual research is a legitimate form—although less represented—of investigation in TS and that the concept of translation is—if not ubiquitous—at least increasingly "enlarging" (Tymoczko, 2007).

Despite the previously discussed works, and as alluded to above, Marais' (2014) attempt to formulate a full-fledged philosophy of translation seems to be the most promising to date. Not only is its content clearly philosophical in that it proposes an overarching view of TS's object of study, of the way it is situated in its system, and of how TS extends its disciplinary territory beyond traditional boundaries; his book is also an explicit "effort to propose a philosophy of translation...from the perspective of complexity" (p. 10). Interestingly, as suggested in the last words of the quote, this philosophy is seen from an allegedly even further vantage point—that of complexity. However, complexity is not a philosophy in its own right but, rather, is usually considered a "theory" or a "science"

(Gershenson et al. 2007). It has been brought into being in order to study complex systems as part of "General System Theory" (von Bartalanffy 1968), in which concepts and principles are deemed to be applicable to all domains of knowledge. In fact, several works on complexity consider their subject to be a part of the philosophy of science (Gershenson et al. 2007; Santos 2012; Rescher 1998), and a useful conceptual tool to account for the complexity of natural phenomena. So much so that Edgar Morin, a philosopher, argues that "all most advanced sciences arrive to [sic] fundamental philosophical problems . . . they thought they have eliminated" (Morin 2007: 24). This means that the abstract nature of complexity issues pertaining to the philosophy of science entails a philosophical reflection that distinguishes between "generalized complexity"—which applies to all fields—and "restricted complexity", which applies only to the sciences (2007: 27). However philosophical this endeavor may be, then, it does not in itself amount to a philosophy of its own. Morin, confirming this point, observes that "[s]till today there is the illusion that complexity is a philosophical problem and not a scientific one" (2007: 24).

Notwithstanding the field which complexity is applied to, Marais' work (2014) moves beyond that of Maria Tymoczko (2007). Marais contends that Tymoczko conceptualizes translation only as an object of study, i.e. a cluster concept (Marais 2014: 88), while one rather needs to conceptualize the entire field of study, i.e. "the lens through which you look at reality" (2014: 89). For Marais, "TS becomes the field of study that studies all reality from the perspective of inter-systemic relationships" (2014: 97). He advocates for "a widening and philosophical strengthening of the foundations of TS in which a future

field devoted to inter-systemic relationships could develop." He calls this emerging field "inter-systemic studies" (2014: 105). No matter how bold these proposals may be, Marais has not explained how his translation concept, as "one particular instance of the category of inter-systemic semiotic phenomena" (2014: 96) actually applies to all of reality. And his pioneering work also leaves further questions unanswered, for example: How can one advocate for an all-systemic perspective—which cannot be but reductionist by definition—while at the same time calling for complexity, i.e. literally a non-reductionist approach (2014: 98-9)? Where does Marais' philosophy of translation stand in Holmes' map of TS? Does his philosophy help with designing an "ontology" (2014: 97) or an "epistemology" (2014: 102)?

Overall, the philosophy of translation that has been developed so far—especially in its most recent versions—clearly indicates the direction that TS research is taking. In fact, all these works show that TS research is increasingly self-conscious regarding its own development and, like metatheory and translation, is becoming self-reflective. However, the question consistently remains whether this type of conceptual research amounts to a philosophy, and whether it is moving TS research forward to the degree that the concept of translation is effectively becoming 'ubiquitous,' not only in the humanities, but also beyond.

Future directions

A philosophy of translation should incorporate not only the various perspectives on translation as an object of study but also its uses—metaphorical and beyond—and a

broad vision of TS's potential in terms of what it could contribute to human knowledge as a whole. In fact, rather than merely being a figurative representation of something else, translation has the potential to be seen as a philosophical paradigm in itself (Ricoeur 1996, 2007), which could be studied and applied outside the bounds of language, culture (Bachmann-Medick 2009), and even metaphor (Guldin 2015). Even if hermeneutics (Heidegger, Gadamer, Steiner, Berman) and the anthropological-postcolonial concept of 'cultural translation' serve as starting points for this broader philosophical investigation (Basalamah 2013), it should at the same time be clear that any philosophy of translation needs to be conceptualized within a reorganized structure of TS, which may require the creation of a new sub-discipline. The main objective of the new sub-discipline would be to delineate the epistemological underpinnings of TS and their extent—within and outside of the discipline. Initially, some more generic definitions of translation need to be provided in order that they may be tested against empirical studies undertaken in various subfields of TS and, at a later stage, in other disciplines of the Humanities and Social Sciences that have not yet been investigated in relation to TS, such as communication, political science and education.

Additionally, in order for a proper philosophy of translation to get off the ground, there are at least four sets of questions that it must be able to address. The first deals with the multiplicity of notions and field affiliations behind the single term 'translation'. Like all other preliminary philosophical investigations, TS would seek a typology of the multiple definitions of the concept of translation in the Humanities and well beyond. The second set of questions concerns the reasons for the spread of occurrences of the concept of

translation in many disciplines, albeit sometimes in metaphorical forms. As a matter of fact, the concept of translation, while it may be found in numerous domains of knowledge, is not 'ubiquitous' (Blumczynski 2016), as criteria of 'translationness' must exist that would distinguish it from processes comparable but not identical to it. But even in the many instances in which the concept of translation encountered is deemed compliant with the criteria of 'translationness', it still raises the question of why it exists outside of its traditional semantic field as "translation proper" (Jakobson 2000: 114) and, more importantly, whether TS should be concerned by these 'external' instances. The third set of questions deals with the relationships between fields of knowledge, conceptual understandings, cooperation, and development. Here, it is proposed that researchers reflect on the ability of translation to act as a metaconcept that facilitates knowledge-expanding inter-disciplinary interactions. This set of questions leads to the fourth and last, which raises the issue of the role of translation in the formation of global knowledge or *Collective Intelligence* (Levy 1994). If translation is about regulated transfer-transformation processes within the boundaries of the relevant disciplines, then at the metatheoretical level it would make sense to reflect about how overall knowledge moves, transforms and grows, both on the local and global scales. As such, all four sets of questions constitute a sort of preamble to the formation of a philosophy of translation conceived of as a sub-discipline of TS.

From object of study to archetype

Once this philosophy of translation has been suitably conceptualized and positioned within the boundaries of TS and its more immediate surroundings, scholars might

undertake an investigation of the ability of a philosophy of translation to contribute to deepening the understanding of the translation concept as a heuristic tool in the wider framework of the three knowledge cultures (Kagan 2009)—and not in the Humanities only. In order to pursue such an investigation, the concept of translation cannot be defined as a mere object of study exclusive to TS but rather must be viewed as an archetypical concept that pervades many fields of knowledge, even if that concept—whatever shape or content it may take—cannot but constitute the legitimate and natural centre of the discipline. As such, the concept of translation would gain a more fundamental status and might aspire to become a founding structure of various specific phenomena that appear in many disciplines.

For instance, drawing on the sociology of actor network theory (ANT), translation could be the defining feature of an assemblage (Latour 2005) of a variety of political movements that would not coalesce without an effort at finding a form of equilibrium among them, or a “chain of equivalence” as Chantal Mouffe would put it (2005: 53). This would be even better captured by the concept of translation, which moves these groups from a state of fragmented powerless political constellation to a reorganized—though still diverse—and reoriented plurality that becomes empowered to direct itself toward a consensual course, and to confront a common political adversary in an agonistic relationship. Translating political movements into a coalition of dissenting forces against a single adversary would entail the transformation of some secondary differences, as well as some primary similarities, into a new political aggregation of powers that would have the ability to confront its shared challenge.

Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2006, 2016) illustrates this phenomenon by describing the dynamics of the grassroots networks of social movements which gather at the World Social Forum (WSF). Santos critiques the western political-theory principle of modernity which states that social change must originate from a constructed unity of action by a "privileged agent of change...to represent the totality from which the coherence and meaning derive[s]" (2006: 131). He refutes this type of general theory, offering in its place "a negative universalism" that he calls "the work of translation" (132). Against the traditional verticality involved in organizing plurality, translation, according to Santos, allows for counter-hegemonic horizontal discourses. The horizontal orientation of these discourses emphasizes the diversity of movements. It also promotes equality, mutual respect and recognition, as well as the crucial process of dialogue and debate that entails the exchange and reciprocal integration of meanings from a multiplicity of cultural and ideological horizons. Besides the general goal of uniting this plurality into a counter-hegemonic agency, translation seeks to accomplish a more specific objective, which is to base the articulations of practices and knowledges on what unites [these movements], rather than on what divides them. Such a task entails a wide exercise in translation to expand reciprocal intelligibility without destroying the identity of the partners in translation (Santos 2006: 133).

The complex medium which this translational process relies on entails the creation of "in every discourse or knowledge, *a contact zone* that may render it porous and hence permeable to other NGOs, practices, strategies, discourses and knowledges" (ibid.

emphasis in original). Drawing on the concept elaborated by Mary-Louise Pratt (2008), Santos observes that the unification of the global social movement network involves working through the intricacies of a "contact zone", defined by Pratt as a "social spac[e] where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (2008: 7). Although Pratt considers this contact zone a privileged locus for power relations "such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (ibid.), it is clear that if Santos ultimately uses it in order to exert resistance against the domination of the global neoliberal hegemony within the global social movement network, he must view it as a pacified space where "[t]hrough translation work, diversity is celebrated, not as a factor of fragmentation and isolationism, but rather as a condition of sharing and solidarity" (ibid.). Hence, translation takes place in the very workings of the multiple-meaning negotiations that must happen when each frame of reference presents itself to the other in order for it to be understood, learned and integrated by the others in the process of expanding the area of their commonalities.

In this case, the objects of translation are twofold: both knowledge and practice. Like the two sides of a coin, the knowledges and practices of the social movements and NGOs are the kernels of meanings that make up the substance of translational transactions. As an example of knowledges, Santos compares the concept of human rights, which represents the western idea of human dignity, to alternative ideas from non-western cultural horizons that are similar but nonetheless different in some respects. In order for the movements and organizations gathering at the WSF to identify shared concerns—such as

human dignity—they need to experience the translation process whereby they would have to expound their respective understandings and conceptual constructions and search for the coincidences, intersections and common grounds. At the same time, so that their respective identities do not get dissipated, they must not neglect to identify where overlappings cannot occur. Hence Santos has “been proposing a translation of concerns for human dignity between the Western concept of human rights, the Islamic concept of *umma* (community) and the Hindu concept of *dharma* (cosmic harmony involving human and all other beings)” (Santos 2006: 134). By practices, Santos means “knowledge practices” for understanding the methods other local movements and organizations use to resolve issues they encounter and overcome hurdles embedded in different cultures and locales, and for relating these to their own methods and issues. In the words of Santos, “[w]hen dealing with practices. . .the work of translation focuses specifically on mutual intelligibility among forms of organization, objectives, styles of action and types of struggle” (2006: 138).

This example shows that, conceived of as an underpinning configuration that gives shape, and a shortcut mental access, to an abstract and complex sociopolitical phenomenon, translation cannot be restricted simply to a convenient metaphor that parallels the traditional interlinguistic transfer process—as could typically be the case with a transmission or reproduction activity, for instance. It is, rather, the representation of a connective, transformative and creative mechanism that could take place in many other fields of knowledge, and reality at large.

It appears that the concept of translation is widely present in many areas of life and in the three cultures of knowledge—the Humanities, the Social Sciences and Natural Sciences—and their practices. But, most interestingly, the concept of translation—when defined at a higher level of abstraction—demonstrates the capability of conceptually unifying the disparate instances into an “archetype” (Basalamah et al. forthcoming). In fact, in order to be considered as such, these instances need to have—albeit not all sufficient and necessary but common—characteristics. Four may be recognized at this stage. The concept of translation as an archetype needs to be capable of 1) connection, articulation and negotiation to reassemble *disparities* 2) transfer in order to move—whether ideational or physical objects—through *space* 3) transformation so that the latter objects can move through *time* and 4) functionality and regulation, as this form of meta-translation is *regulated* and *purposeful*—albeit not always consciously.

Moreover, following Carl Gustav Jung’s definition of archetypes as “the hidden foundations of the conscious mind” (1970 § 53), the notion of translation rises to that higher level of abstraction and generalization, suggesting that the archetype of translation is one of those “templates for organizing the universal themes that recur over and over again in human experience” (Meadow 1992: 188). This means that “translation as an archetype” is *the template of all phenomena and processes* featured by the dialectical relationships of 1) *connectedness, articulation and negotiation*, 2) *transfer and/or* 3) *transformation*. And it should be conducted *in a purposeful and regulated manner*—with or without a subjective intent.

The above overview is a clear indication that such an abstract notion of translation requires a rather overarching function to recognize and describe all concrete or metaphorical occurrences of translation at the levels of semiotics (signs), statements (elaborate verbal signs), theories (complex concepts) and worldviews (collective frames of reference). However, one could wonder about the usefulness of such a rather highly abstract concept and its cross-secting scope. For the purposes of this chapter, suffice it to say that the concept of translation as archetype could serve as a heuristic tool 1) within disciplines in order to bridge subdisciplines, 2) between disciplines so that cooperation could take place to respond to particular issues requiring more than one expert perspective and 3) across disciplines, even across disciplinary cultures. In fact, what is proposed here is not a simple concept but a freshly coined *conceptual template* that may serve to offer a space for a philosophy of translation, and propose for TS an intra-, inter- and trans-disciplinary research program that could, *retrospectively*, identify and explain instances of functional articulations, transfers and transformations, as well as, *prospectively*, suggest heuristic methods to illustrate new instances of connections, transfers and transformations—i.e. translations.

As an example of translation within a discipline, in the field of education the transformation of the learner and the instructor during the learning/teaching interaction, as well as the process of the learner becoming an educator, would be deemed *translational*. It could be argued that both instances of transformation/articulation conform on the one hand to the criteria of what differentiates a translation occurrence from a simple change, and, on the other hand, to a dialectics of ontologies and

epistemologies, in that any form of knowledge learning is conducive to an ontological transformation. If in this case *Education is Translation* according to Cook-Sather (2006), then TS needs to take stock of this development occurring not only outside its disciplinary jurisdiction but also outside its epistemic culture, such as in education, which is situated in the social sciences.

The horizon of transdisciplinarity

However, beyond the notion of archetypical translation—the transcending metaconcept of translation as exemplified through the educational conceptualization above—one could ask: what larger purpose would it serve? If translation, as it is conceived of at a higher level of abstraction, allows us to consider the connection, transfer and/or transformation of any types of objects and subjects, it follows that the very knowledge that a metaconcept reflects about is a prominent one to contemplate in the context of the relationships of its multiple sources and cultures, i.e. disciplines. A functional and useful philosophy of translation would embrace the epistemological task of thinking about the relationships, communication, and integration processes of academic disciplines among themselves. It would consider how this task could lead to a greater ability to address concrete real-world problems.

In Margaret Somerville and David Rapport's co-edited book on transdisciplinarity (2000) that has become a standard reference in the field, it is remarkable to find that the concepts of translation, language, and communication have been used regularly by several of its contributors to convey their respective understanding of their objects of study. For

instance, in a reflexive synthesis on the book's contributions, Julie Thompson Klein, a leading scholar on the topic of transdisciplinarity, evokes some of the metaphors that have shaped the reflections on the central topic of the book. For example, "[c]alling to mind the cautionary tale of the tower of Babel, [Roderick] Macdonald stressed that all communication requires translation across disciplinary languages. His example of a team-taught seminar on law, language, and ethics exemplified the necessity of translation in creating a shared meta-discourse on a common objective." (Thompson Klein 2000: 11) In turn, Gavan McDonell emphasized that "[t]here is always the necessity to engage in interdisciplinary translation, and it is almost inevitable that there will be attempts to establish the dominance of a particular language game." (McDonell 2000: 29) These examples and others, despite their more direct reference to translation, show that beyond the primary metaphorical uses of the term, there is a paradigmatic dimension to the concept which articulates one of the central issues of the notion of transdisciplinarity: its definition. If being transdisciplinary is to implement a form of translation, then the test is to see whether the defining features of transdisciplinarity correspond to those of translation.

For instance, Roderick Macdonald (2000) insists that "transdisciplinarity is not the bridging of existing disciplines; it is their transcendence by a new epistemology" (2000: 69). He views it as "a label for an epistemology that renounces existing intellectual disciplines. It necessarily claims for itself transcendent explanatory power. . .By definition, transdisciplinarity is primarily about epistemic constructs." (2000: 70) As such, this understanding of transdisciplinarity would mean that there is a metadisciplinary level

where boundaries are subsumed into an undifferentiated epistemology that is concerned only with how knowledge is constructed rather than how it addresses actual real-world issues. On the opposite side of this conception is the position of Desmond Manderson (2000) who contends that

the nature of transdisciplinary study does not seek to find a "higher level" of knowledge that is in some sense unified or superior. . . The aim of bringing together diverse disciplines in a transdisciplinary project is not to *transcend* that knowledge base but rather to *transform* it. . . The concept of dialogue between different languages captures what I see as important in transdisciplinary scholarship. . . We live in Babel. But as this dialogue develops, we each learn new concepts and images through a growing appreciation of the richness and difference of the language of the other. These new words and approaches are then able to be incorporated into our own languages. A dialogue between disciplines does not transcend them any more than a dialogue between languages renders each language obsolete. But such a dialogue is a crucial learning experience through which we learn, and change, and grow (Manderson 2000: 92, emphases in the original).

Manderson not only emphasizes his rejection of Macdonald's definition of transdisciplinarity (a horizontal and dialogical convergence of different but equal disciplines that learn from each other rather than a transcendence to disciplinarity that

deals with epistemic constructs only); he also reaches a very 'translational' conclusion about the type of relationship that should exist between disciplines. He envisions neither their transcendence to a higher level of knowledge nor their submission to the hegemony of one discipline over others, but rather their mutual transformation. As a matter of fact, one of translation's lessons when it is conceived of as a conversation, as in hermeneutics (Gadamer 2004) or in education (Cook-Sather 2006), is the mutual reshaping of every party engaged in the translational process. Even in linguistic translation, one of the learning experiences translators undergo consists of discovering their own transfiguration in the course of their translational effort, no matter how limited it may be.

Going back to the *raison d'être* for the metaconcept of archetypical translation: it is to contribute beyond the traditional boundaries of TS in at least two ways. On the one hand, with the awareness that "boundaries between disciplines are changing: by increasing specialization through internal differentiation within the disciplines, and by the integration of disciplines" (Hirsh Hadorn et al. 2008: 28), an archetypical translation conception would venture into a stream of research that enables the connection, exchange, and mutual transformation of disciplines. On the other hand, with the growing need for these types of transversal programmes of research, the archetypical translation framework would involve a transdisciplinary approach via its integrating of scientific disciplines, of problem fields, and of actors in the life-world (2008: 33).

Whatever the fate of such a proposal may be, the fact of the matter is that we still work in a disciplinary research context, and transdisciplinarity cannot for the time being be

dismissive of disciplines. Hence, as long as we acknowledge this state of affairs, a philosophy of translation with a transdisciplinary objective would devote itself to, and find its *telos* in, the promotion of a multi-directional learning process. That process must utilize concepts and methods from various disciplines so that each discipline is empowered to conceptualize reality from perspectives other than its own. As a result, each discipline will expand its tools for understanding complex realities by adding at least one dimension of conceptualization to the confines of its traditional boundaries.

By way of conclusion, like Margaret Somerville (2000), who considers transdisciplinarity a "self-reflexive" exercise "to examine the limits of the concepts and methods of each discipline, and to seek new theories, concepts, and methods" (2000: 95), I propose that a philosophy of translation could be a synoptic disciplinary space in which the creation of an archetypal metaconcept of translation might encourage self-reflexivity not only within TS, but also in the transdisciplinary dialogue that most advanced forms of research attempt to engage in.

Further reading

Benjamin, W. [1923] (2012) 'The Translator's Task', tr. by S. Rendall, in L. Venuti (ed) *The Translation Studies Reader* [Third edition], London and New York: Routledge, 75-83. (The most influential esoteric statement on translation, drawing on imagery from the Kabbalah.)

Hermans, T. (2007) *The Conference of the Tongues*, Manchester: St. Jerome. (An example of triangulation of phenomenon, philosophy and translation theory: see the

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investigations of the Septuagint and the *Book of Mormon* (Chapter 1), and of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (Chapter 4.)

Magee, G.A. (ed) (2016) *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (A survey of current research. Magee's Introduction is particularly illuminating.)

Steiner, G. [1975] (1998) *After Babel* [Third edition], Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Important for its historical overview of the links between translation and alternative traditions and for Steiner's argument that such traditions have a lot to tell us about language, and therefore about translation.)

Large, D. (2014) 'On the Work of Philosopher-Translators', in J. Boase-Beier, A. Fawcett and P. Wilson (eds.) *Literary Translation: Redrawing the Boundaries*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 182-203. (Large begins his survey of philosopher-translators by discussing the translation of philosophy and the philosophy of translation.)

Scott, C. (forthcoming) *The Work of Literary Translation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (An attempt to write a philosophy of translation by a scholar influenced by phenomenology.)

Related topics

current trends in philosophy and translation; translation theory and philosophy; culture; interdisciplinarity

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