EXPANSIONS

John Ødemark
Institute for Cultural Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo
& Eivind Engebretsen
Institute of Health and Society, University of Oslo, Norway

"Translation" has emerged in the previous decades as a key word in disciplines such as history, anthropology and science and technology studies (STS). Moreover, from around 2000 it has become institutionalized in medicine, leading to the development of so-called knowledge translation (KT). While the turn to translation in the humanities could be seen as an index of contemporary epistemological predicaments and the almost obligatory requirement to cross disciplinary and cultural boundaries in a 'global age', medical translation is of a different nature. KT denotes a scientific and purportedly non-cultural practice that defines cultural difference as a "barrier" to the transmission of medical science. In contrast, STS have celebrated the productivity of translation as the condition of possibility for science and society. In the following we will map some salient traits of the current expansions of translation beyond the linguistic.

1. Expanding Translation

We should first note that current expansions of translation could be seen as a return to older notions. "Translatio" and "transferre" are Latin translations of the Greek "metaphora" and "metaphero"; the name of the trope thus refers to the act of carrying something across a

boundary, without specifying the nature of the transferred object as linguistic (Cheyfitz 1997: 35). Taken literally "translation" simply implies that a boundary is crossed by some agent carrying some (undefined) thing. Premodern notions of translation accordingly encompassed boundary crossings such as the *translatio* of Saints (referring both to the ritual transfer of holy bodies and the texts documenting them), and the *translatio studii et imperii* (the transference of power/knowledge from old to new empires) (Evans 1998).

Consequently, current expansions of translation from the literary and linguistic could be regarded as a return to broader material and cultural conceptualizations (Evans 1998). Moreover, it is also possible to identify a persistent presence of literary figurations of translation – a topological constants of translation that "remain invariant when that figure [translation] is bent out of shape" (1975: 448-9) – in contemporary expansions.

2. Translating Medicine

KT is a case in point. It refers to a set of research activities with the common goal of "bridging the gap" between science and clinical application. This is construed as a chain involving distinct stages of knowledge production and translation that transports knowledge produced in laboratories into scientifically warranted healthcare across the globe (Greenhalgh 2011; Straus et al 2009).

KT is based on an uncritical transfer of an ideology that sees translation as a practice aiming at equivalences between a source text (ST) and a target text (TT), as governed by the norm of fidelity to the source – and it construes the translator's work as "invisible" (Venuti 2008) or "ancillary" (Berman 1984). Moreover, KT combines notions from aesthetic romanticism (translation is the art of "carrying across" the genius of the original masterpiece),

and an unquestioned enlightenment model of knowledge dissemination (knowledge should trickle down from "elite" theory into medical practice). All translational shifts are unwarranted, since knowledge has already reached its culmination in the scientific ST. Nevertheless, KT implicates various vernacular texts at different stages in the process; ending in clinical guidelines which prescribe correct interventions in particular cases. These different TT's relate to the ST (scientific knowledge) as what J. Derrida calls a "double supplement" – a textual addition that both *adds to* and *compensates for* an inherent lack of unequivocal meaning in the ST (Derrida 1998: 144-145). Similarly, the *textual supplements* that disseminates the scientific message outside the scientific community aim to compensate for a lack of knowledge (among clinicians and patients), and demonstrate that a concern with different target cultures is inevitable even in "autonomous" science.

3. Translating History and Anthropology

Aspects of the turn to translation in history could likewise be regarded as a reworking of topological constants. P. Burke, for instance, assimilated the task of the historian to that of the translator:

> If the past is a foreign country, it follows that even the most monoglot of historians is a translator. Historians mediate between the past and the present and face the same dilemma as other translators, serving two masters and attempting to reconcile fidelity to the original with intelligibility to their readers (Burke 2007: 7).

Clearly this is a transfer of Schleiermacher's dilemma (the translator is a servant vacillating between two masters) to history; the past serves as the ST that the historian turns into a TT addressed to a present target audience. However, this analogy between translation

and history also rest upon a notion of "culture" taken from the anthropology of Evans-Pritchard: "'cultural translation" was originally coined by anthropologists […] to describe what happened in cultural encounters when each side tries to make sense of […] the other" (ibid: 8). The relation to contemporary cultural difference in anthropology is thus a model for the historian's relation to the past. We observe that cultural translation here is assumed to take place in-between bounded cultural entities (tribes, nations, and periods). Essentially, it is the concept of cultural difference that creates the need for translation in history, for translation is only needed when the past is seen as "foreign country" with its own cultural scheme – not an earlier version of our own.

Debates about relativism and the commensurability of knowledge claims from different cultures and historical periods have been labeled under the term "translation" at least from the 1930'es (Tambiah 1990). Many such inquiries have taken – precisely – such bounded notions of cultures, or some similar notion such as "paradigm" (Kuhn) or "episteme" (Foucault), as the point of departure for reflection upon translatability and so-called *radical translation*, situations of (presumed) *first contact* where there are no manuals of translation (dictionaries, grammars) available. Often such theorizing uses anecdotal ethnographical evidence about "first contact", and assumes that bounded eighteenth century constructs like national languages and cultures are applicable to all history. Such assumptions have been discredited in recent theory and history (Bauman & Briggs 2003; Hacking 2002).

4. Material Translation and the Commensurability of Knowledge

The expansions sketched above mainly limit translation to the domain of language and concepts. Recent trends in STS and actor-network theory (ANT) aim to incorporate material

and natural actors in the analysis of translation. B. Latour regards all knowledge as a product of translation – seen as an ontologically inclusive network assembling humans and non-humans actors. This expansion is conceived as a critique of the dominance of textual models in the humanities. Actually, the whole idea of representation has been problematized by ANT and the so-called ontological turn in anthropology. The concern with representation that characterized the critique of representation is regarded as reproducing the asymmetrical notion of *many cultures* that offers divergent representations of the *universal nature* described and warranted by Western science, which thus offers an ethnocentric yardstick for translation. Latour presents a pragmatic solution to the problem of relativism by asserting that knowledge and culture have always been translated. Translation is always undertaken with reference to yardsticks that do not belong to the 'nature' of things, but to the instruments of commensuration. Since "[n]othing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else", but always requires "the mediation of another", how can one then "claim that worlds are untranslatable, when translation is the very soul of the process of relating?" In practice the problems of commensurability that have worried philosophers and anthropologist are solved. The task is consequently to identify empirically what instruments of commensuration are at work in particular acts of translation (Latour 1993: 113). For Latour this will also imply both human and non-human actors.

R. Baumann and C. Briggs counters that Latour has "left out two of the key constructs that make modernity work and make it precarious!", namely language and tradition. Lock's *Treaties of Government* serves as an example. Locke here describes three 'great provinces' that have to be kept separate in order to make objective claims about the world: Things (nature), actions (society) – and signs (Baumann & Briggs 2003). Hence, they aim to supplement Latour's approach with more nuanced notions of the role of textual translation in

the construction of otherness. In this they converge with recent scholarship in on "cultural grids" in translation studies.

5. Converging Translations

Our initial example, KT, underscores the necessity of incorporating texts, things and cultural schemes in the analysis. KT plays a dominant role in hegemonic discourses of global health, and it involves the transfer of things and texts across innumerable socio-cultural sites, to target human bodies. This example therefore demonstrates the importance of scrutinizing the interrelations between material, cultural and textual models of translation. In such a scrutiny recent scholarship in translation studies "proper" should have an important place. Scholarship here has emphasized that translations always imply semantic shifts, and must be "rewritten in domestic dialects and discourses, registers and styles" (Venuti 2008). Moreover, the importance of cultural factors has been underscored. André Lefevere, for instance, maintained that problems in translation are not primarily of a linguistic nature. Rather, questions of translatability have more to do with cultural factors, what he refers to as "discrepancies in the conceptual and textual grids', than with 'discrepancies in languages" (Lefevere 1999). Interpreting the phrase "once upon a time" as different from "a long time ago," for instance, requires knowledge of discursive genres. Such cultural and textual framings cannot be read out of the sentence as mere linguistic data. Linguistic translation, then, also has to account for cultural factors, like metadiscursive practices, and different styles of reasoning.

With this in mind, we can also identify a certain convergence between the perspectives of Burke (above) and Lefevere. An object of interdisciplinary inquiry (translation) emerging at the intersection of language and culture:

How is it possible to be able to translate every word in a text from an alien (or even half-alien) culture, yet to have difficulty in understanding the text? Because […] there is a difference in mentality, in other words different assumptions, different perceptions, and a different "logic" – at least in the philosophically loose sense of different criteria for justifying assertions – reason, authority, experience and so on (Burke 1997: 165).

Even after the linguistic work has been completed, difficulties of interpretation remain. This it is an indication of possible differences in "culture". Here an object of investigation emerges with the need of a supplementary act of translation, when understating fails to come through "mere" linguistic analysis.

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Further Reading

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