

Translation: a new paradigm

Today, translation scholarship and practice face a twofold situation. On the one hand translation studies is enjoying unprecedented success: translation has become a fecund and frequent metaphor for our contemporary intercultural world, and scholars from many disciplines, for instance, linguistics, comparative literature, cultural studies, anthropology, psychology, communication and social behavior, and global studies have begun investigating translational phenomena. On the other hand, many scholars in the field recognize an epistemological crisis in the discipline of translation studies, noticing a repetition of theories and a plethora of stagnant approaches. This impasse derives largely from the field's inability to renew the discipline and its unwillingness to develop approaches that are able to say something original or reflect the complex situations of migration and hybrid cultures and languages we live in today. Translation needs to redefine its role in a context of fragmented texts and languages in a world of crises within national identities and emerging transnational and translocal realities.

The fertility of the metaphor of translation is worthy of study, and we probably will find out that it is not merely a metaphor. Since Salman Rushdie's well-known statement "Having been borne across the world, we are translated men" (1991), translation has become a frequent concept to describe and even explain identity as it surfaces in travelling, migrating, diasporic, and border-crossing individuals and cultures. It has been so frequent that some even state we are experiencing a "translation turn" in the humanities. The anthropologist Talal Asad's concept of "cultural translation" became central in the seminal *Writing Cultures* edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus in 1986. Later Clifford developed this concept and imagined travels and even museums as translations (1997). Even though many scholars today are familiar with such a broad use of the concept of translation, they tend to keep them separated from "real" translation. The step forward we want to make with and through this journal is to consider Rushdie's translated men and Asad and Clifford's cultural translations as real acts of translation, as representations of how translations appear in our world.

Beyond disciplinary boundaries: post-translation studies

With this new journal the editors attempt to go beyond disciplinary borders, and specifically beyond the bounds of translation studies. We invite original thinking about what translation is today and where translation occurs. We welcome new concepts that speak about translation and hope to reshape translation discourse within these new terms and ideas. To achieve this goal, we must go beyond the traditional borders of the discipline, and even beyond interdisciplinary studies. We propose the inauguration of a transdisciplinary research field with translation as an interpretive as well as operative tool. We imagine a sort of new era that could be termed **post-translation studies**, where translation is viewed as fundamentally transdisciplinary, mobile, and open ended. The "post" here recog-

nizes a fact and a conviction: new and enriching thinking on translation must take place outside the traditional discipline of translation studies. The time is past when we can maintain the usual borders of translation studies, just as the time is past when in a more general way we can close the borders of certain disciplines and exclude translation discourse from entering their intellectual space. We are convinced that today—at least in the humanities but surely in principle for all academic fields—exchange and dynamic discourse are fundamental. Gayatri Spivak's discourse in *Death of a Discipline* (2003), dealing specifically with comparative literature, is emblematic of concerns within translation studies:

We cannot not try to open up, from the inside, the colonialism of European national language-based Comparative Literature and the Cold War format of Area Studies, and infect history and anthropology with the 'other' as producer of knowledge. From the inside, acknowledging complicity. No accusations. No excuses. Rather, learning the protocol of those disciplines, turning them around, laboriously, not only by building institutional bridges but also by persistent curricular interventions. The most difficult thing here is to resist mere appropriation by the dominant. (2003: 10-11)

The crisis of translation studies: a missing epistemology

The crisis of translation studies compares with other situations of crisis in many disciplines, especially those in the humanities and social sciences: all have to do with fundamental questions of knowledge and meaning. The crisis or, let's say, the death of translation studies as a discipline, leads us necessarily to transdisciplinarity. To speak of transdisciplinarity is not to propose that we create new relationships between closed disciplines; rather, transdisciplinarity opens up closed disciplines and inquires into translational features that they have in common or toward translational moments that transcend them. Such a perspective implies that no single logic, no single tool, no single perspective by itself is sufficient to explain the world's complexity, and that research cannot be inscribed in one discipline, with one defined object and method. Translation in this sense is a "nomadic concept"; it is born in transdisciplinarity and it lives in transdisciplinarity.

Epistemologically this transdisciplinarity signals a change: it is not the disciplines that decide how to analyse their objects of research, but the objects themselves that ask for certain instruments, neither inside nor outside the academic boundaries of the disciplines, but "above" them. We are speaking of a different way of facing the great epistemological questions of what we know and how we know, and these questions model new transdisciplinary research. Such research cannot follow linear paths that conceive of structures as trees, but must rather walk along rhizomatic paths, in the sense given to it by Deleuze and Guattari: "unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the one nor the multiple" [1980 (1987): 21].

In an epistemological sphere it becomes less important to distinguish and define clearly what translation is and what it is not, what stands inside the borders of translation and what

stands outside. Such distinctions and definitions belong to an older and widespread sense of limits that scholars register when they create categorical, but also hierarchical and dichotomous divisions between self and other, true and false, original and translation, inside and outside, feminine and masculine, pretending that they are natural. From queer theory as well as from border studies, and in general from poststructuralist thinking, we have learned that these divisions are constructed and that many texts, identities and cultures move in between, on the edges and in the interstices, in transversal movements. In this sense we can also evoke other delezian conceptualisations, such as *multiplicity*, and even that of transpositions of *multiple differences* developed by Rosi Braidotti (2006), to promote the idea of a multiple transdisciplinary concept of translation.

The evolution of translation studies

In order to create a common ground for our future dialogue, we sketch in the following paragraphs a brief history of what we consider the principal stages in the evolution of the discipline of translation studies (from the Seventies until today). In 1990 Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere stated that “the growth of translation studies as a separate discipline is a success story of the 1980s.” We take this claim to mean that translation studies was at that time no longer in a subordinate position to linguistics or comparative literature. Still, when translation studies sought out its own autonomy, it relied heavily on the definition James S. Holmes had already given the discipline in the early Seventies. At that time Holmes moved translation studies away from prescriptivism towards empirical description of what happens when cultures translate each other’s texts. At the beginning of the Eighties, and still in this theoretical context, the Israeli scholars Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury introduced a perspective that saw translations as a part of a culture’s literary polysystem. Elsewhere, in the so-called “manipulation school,” scholars like Theo Hermans, André Lefevere and José Lambert defined all translations inevitably as manipulations of an original text. These scholars located the causes for such manipulations not only in the differences between the structures and segmentation of meaning within languages, but also in the structure of cultures, for instance in a culture’s range of ideologies.

Inevitably, then, the Nineties came to be characterized by a “cultural turn” that insisted on the intercultural nature of any translation, whereby ideology was a determining factor. Here scholars took some of the first interdisciplinary steps. This cultural turn defined the questions surrounding translation in new terms. As translation studies drew on and was inspired by cultural studies and poststructuralism, it took into account questions of gender and postcolonialism and recognized the political value of translating. With this turn translation studies struck out in international directions, reaching beyond Europe and influencing Asia (see the work of Z. Tan, M. Cheung), Canada (S. Simon), and North America (L. Venuti, E. Gentzler, M. Tymoczko). Postcolonial studies, on the other hand, started to question the Eurocentric perspectives of translation studies, turning its attention to alternative

directions that recognize how every translation implies a conflict between dominating and dominated cultures and languages.

To summarize: the Eighties and Nineties were characterized by an eagerness to found a new and autonomous discipline. No doubt this effort has been successful and of fundamental importance for the recognition of what translation is, and for its role in the development and transformation of language and culture. Still, and in terms of a conscious appreciation of the important role occupied by translators and translations both throughout history and today, there is still much work to be done. While we encourage the continuation of this very important work in translation studies, we also see that this concentration on the definition of translation as an autonomous discipline represents a problem, a problem for translation studies itself. It is the problem of epistemological roots, or rather the lack of epistemological roots. Translation studies, having “collected” data and knowledge from other disciplines, was so eager to stand on its own feet that it neglected to develop and explain its own overarching epistemology and to show how it knew what it claimed to know. In our view what was created as the discipline of translation studies was actually an illusion: it existed in a sort of epistemological naïvety. Pieces from other disciplines like linguistics and comparative literature were assembled without being really questioned. What was done was simply to open up pathways on a terrain already covered with well-travelled pathways, and with exactly the same epistemological map and guiding principles as those present in the disciplines from which the so-called founders borrowed. What should have been done, or what was lacking in our opinion, was an epistemological and paradigmatic shift.

In this panorama we should nevertheless recognize and salute the important efforts made by translation studies as it introduced new and alternative paradigms. André Lefevere significantly proposed the category of **ideology** and introduced the concept of **rewriting**. Edwin Gentzler introduced at a critical moment the category of **power**. But inside the boundaries of translation studies these new concepts did not develop completely. It is our hope that the research of such scholars might find fertile ground and wide reception through the transdisciplinary perspective we are proposing. We are confident that the journal's contributors will rethink and, hopefully, re-establish the epistemological foundations behind our conceptualization of translation. This re-establishing will, we think, necessarily follow because the material of our research is new, or better; its focus is both broader than and different from the focus and material conceived by traditional translation studies.

Setting a fresh course

Despite an original focus and fresh material content, the object of our research, namely translation, remains the same. But it will appear differently. New objects called translation will emerge, letting the already existing ones take a different shape and value. It is similar to those moments when scholarship uses new words to speak about and describe a thing, allowing the thing itself to appear different and, in addition, allowing us to see things in a fresh light.

It is more and more difficult to define translation and to limit the situations in which translation occurs. Today many of us are familiar with the idea that translation is a transformative process not only of texts produced in different languages and media, but one that affects cultures and individuals. While some express concern about an ill-defined and delimited concept, we are of the view that such an approach is a strength and that any premature and a priori definition of the limits and borders of translation prevents us from evolving new theories and changing our assumptions and directions. The tendency within the discipline of translation studies is to continue to operate with traditional definitions and conceptualizations of translation, and thus with the same epistemological paradigm, sometimes proposing additional definitions, but never new and alternative ones. We believe this tendency is reductive and unhelpful for thinking about translation and suggest that it is time to open up new and in some cases startlingly new uses of the concept of translation. By accepting new ideas, by moving the focus, and by revealing new objects, we believe it will be possible to develop and organize the necessary theoretical consequences, to more fully understand what translation entails, to pinpoint where translation occurs today, and to formulate a perspective able to deal with all these different translation situations.

Jakobson and beyond: the hybrid nature of culture

Since we believe translation is a universal and characteristic aspect of our contemporary world we will have to go far beyond the tripartite model (intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation) proposed by Roman Jakobson in 1959. His model had the advantage of considering translation also outside language and written texts, and as a transformative interpretive practice taking place between different semiotic systems. But even this approach is much too reductive.

Today, translation has to be considered as a transformative representation of, in, and among cultures and individuals. Until recently translation has been studied almost exclusively as a transaction between cultures, where cultures have been identified within single nation states and linguistic limits. Only in the latest studies have scholars begun to consider the phenomenon of translation among other cultural identities that are situated inside, upon, or across the traditional delimitations of national and linguistic borders. These scholars have recognized the fragmented, hybrid nature of cultures and texts.

The direction indicated by Edwin Gentzler, who states that “translations in the Americas are less something that happens between separate and distinct cultures and more something that is constitutive of these cultures” expresses the way forward (2008: 5). We think that translation is constitutive not only for American cultures, but for all cultures and culture as such.

When we speak of cultures here, we also think about individuals, subjectivities and identities. And even in a broader sense, it is not only about widening the perspective, but seeing translation in new and different spaces.

Radically rethinking translation

This kind of radical rethinking of translation is what our new journal brings forward as its special contribution to research: translational processes are fundamental for the creation of culture(s) and identities, for the ongoing life of culture(s), and for the creation of social and economic values. As the Russian cultural semiotician Jury M. Lotman puts it, translation is the necessary mechanism of cultural dynamics:

For culture to exist as a mechanism organizing the collective personality with a common memory and a collective consciousness, there must be present a pair of semiotic systems with the consequent possibility of text translation. (2000: 34)

We believe translation constitutes a fundamental condition for the existence and the transformation of cultures, and especially of cultural spheres where values, and in particular economic values, reside: as Chakrabarty persuasively asserts, “the problem of capitalist modernity cannot any longer be seen simply as a sociological transition [...] but as a problem of translation, as well” (2000: 17).

In effect, translation appears to us as the social relation from which the critique of communication and its corollary “culture” as the reigning ideology of Capital is most directly linked to a politics of life, or again, the politics in which life becomes invested by Capital. (Solomon 2007: 6)

We also recognize that everything said so far should also be applied to the new, and still renewing, media environments in which translation occurs. Our use of the internet, social media, and digital and screen tools produces consequences for translation that transform identities, power structures, theoretical models and day-to-day practices that constitute society. These transformations in all their radical implications deserve our profound investigation. From this point of view, the project called *Open Translation* appears particularly interesting, as it proposes “a new participatory ecology of translation emerging on the internet” questioning in this way “the proposition that discrete languages exist before the act of translation” (Neilson 2009).

Within contemporary translation studies the traditional concept of translation is unable to determine what translation actually is or identify all the different situations in which it occurs. Ironically, the larger, contemporary world of scholarship, outside the discipline of translation studies, understands translation in a much broader sense. As we indicate above, we do not dismiss the possibility that “real” translation and the metaphor of translation overlap and mix. On the contrary, we wish to establish a dialogue with any area of research in which translation is, implicitly or explicitly, occupying a central conceptual position, or even a marginal one. The way, for instance, that Ulf Hannerz (1990, 1996) or Tullio Maranhão (2003) have conceptualized cultural translation in anthropology is illuminating for thinking about translation itself. In the same way, Sakai and Solomon’s (2006) way of thinking about translation in economic, ontological and political terms is equally illuminating. Translation in these uses of the concept has taken on additional meaning and given deeper meaning to the whole translation problem.

Translation matters in different fields of research

Other scholars, representing different fields of research, have written on translation in terms that have been new for studies on translation, and that we think should be given more credit than hitherto afforded. We are thinking of scholars such as Derrida and his concepts of monolingualism (1998) and hospitality (2000) as they bear on translation, and of Bhabha and his concept of cultural translation (1994).

In recent years, due to the discipline's stronger interdisciplinarity, many areas of human experience and representation connected to translation have begun to be explored. The different aspects of translation connected to issues of postcolonialism are perhaps the most evident examples of positive exchange among the disciplines: through postcolonial perspectives, translation studies has been able to put aside a Eurocentric dominance that has on both a theoretical and practical level blinded research to important questions of cultures in contact. With a postcolonial perspective, research has been able to uncover the many varieties of inequality in cultural exchange.

Back to epistemology

This epistemological potentiality of the concept of translation is an untapped resource and seems central to us here. Both inside and outside translation studies scholars are today working on epistemologically relevant themes that clearly connect to translation: **memory** (B. Brodzki), **space** (S. Simon), **conflict** (E. Apter, M. Baker) and **economics** (J. Solomon, S. Mezzadra). What is new in this work is that translation functions as an interpretive and operative instrument for deeper analysis and a more profound comprehension of these themes. By reconceptualizing these themes in and around the concept of translation, we believe new perspectives will emerge.

Translation is poised to become a powerful epistemological instrument for reading and assessing the transformation and exchange of cultures and identities. As we see it, this new appreciation of translation compares favorably with the emergence of the concept of structure in the Seventies. We welcome this tendency because we are sure it is a way to study how translation is constitutive for cultures. We are witnessing nothing less than a sea-change in the world of translation. Translation is moving away from being simply a concept based in certain disciplines to being an epistemological principle applicable to the whole field of humanistic, social and natural sciences.

If we follow this path, we will reshape the epistemological principles of the humanities and at the same time fashion a new instrument that also will permit us to reconsider translation in all its properties and facets. Only in this sense do we see a future for reflection on translation.

New directions

What kind of new directions will the journal follow? Without excluding any fruitful direction, we can already anticipate that it will seek to investigate the **hybrid** nature of languages, cultures, identities in our present deterritorialized world of **difference** and the ways in which **space** is continuously crossed, translated, and redefined through **migration**. It will be attuned to our **globalized and localized world** that is at one and the same time a common and divided world, structured around differential **power** relations and **ideologies**, where new **media scenarios** occupy an active role both reflecting and causing completely new conditions for **representation** and translation. **War** and **conflict** for their part will have the power to transform our world into a “translation zone” (Apter 2006), where **economy** and **politics** of course play the most powerful role in terms of value. The journal will also direct us to **knowledge**, especially to its acquisition and distribution, but also to the important channel called **memory**, which is responsible for the transmission and **cultural translation** of present cultural knowledge and **literature** to future cultures and their encyclopedias of knowledge. As the journal develops into a natural and much needed space for a new kind of analysis of translation, this will always be characterized by its **transdisciplinary approach**.

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